

Better Cities & Towns

Better *places*, stronger communities.

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2014—VOLUME 3, NUMBER 5

Top 10 Misconceptions about form-based codes

Several common assumptions about new urban codes fail to stand up to scrutiny.

TONY PEREZ

Since 1981, approximately 400 form-based codes (FBCs) have been prepared for communities across the US, and as of 2012, 252 of them have been adopted. Eighty-two percent of the adoptions have taken place in the past 10 years. But as exciting as that may be, what's more exciting is that these numbers are miniscule when you think about how many communities exist in the U.S. If this reform of conventional zoning is increasingly gaining acceptance and being applied to larger areas, why are there still so many misconceptions?

Despite a wide variety of improvements in how form-based codes are strategized, prepared, and used, many of the planners, planning commissioners, elected officials, members of the public, and code practitioners I meet continue to harbor misconceptions or misunderstandings about these codes. Here are the ones I encounter most:

FBC dictates architecture. Some of these codes do prescribe details about architecture, but most do not. Perhaps because many of the early codes were for greenfield projects where strong architectural direction was needed or desired, the perception is that a FBC always regulates architecture. Yet the majority of codes I've prepared and reviewed (30 authored or co-authored, 10 peer-reviewed, 9 U.S. states, 2 foreign countries) do *not* regulate architecture. I've prepared codes where regulation of architecture (style) was important for a historic area, but those requirements did not apply anywhere else. The "form" in form-based codes may mean architecture, but not necessarily. Form can refer to physical character at many different scales—the scale of a region, community, neighborhood, corridor, block, or building.

FBC must be applied citywide. To my knowledge, Miami, and Denver are the only US cities that have applied form-based coding to all parcels within their boundaries. In general, FBCs are applied in two ways: to a site to implement a development project or to several areas as part of a zoning code amendment or update. This second category sometimes involves reconfiguration of the zoning code to retain a set of conventional zones for "automobile-oriented suburban" patterns while adding form-based zones for "walkable-urban" patterns. This is called a hybrid code because it merges the

SEE "MISCONCEPTIONS" ON PAGE 4



Michigan's chief of placemaking

The first statewide Chief Placemaking Officer coordinates government policies and works with the private sector to maximize investment in place.

Gary Heidel, Chief Placemaking Officer for the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) since 2013, is the first and only official with that title in any US state.

Heidel oversees a MSHDA program that focuses public and private resources on what he calls "strategic placemaking" in towns and cities in order to generate economic development. "We are trying to take advantage of new market demand that has been created," Heidel says. "It's a combination of the millennial generation and baby boomers who want a specific type

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Robert Steuteville, editor and publisher

Philip Langdon, contributing editor

Lisa A. Rosenthal, production associate and advertising

Sara Brown, copy editor

MAILING ADDRESS: *Better! Cities & Towns*, PO Box 6515, Ithaca, NY 14851 (ph) 607/275-3087 (fax) 607/272-2685 Email: mail@newurbannews.com web: bettercities.net

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COMMENTARY

Place Mobility: Sometimes good transportation is slow

ROBERT STEUTEVILLE

I've written a lot about streetcars lately (see the article on the Tucson streetcar on page 9). I will stipulate that streetcars are slow and expensive and only make sense under certain local conditions. Yet cities keep building them, and where they have been built they often provide excellent return on investment—Portland and Seattle are prime examples. Tucson appears to be another success story, with \$1.5 billion in development along its route since the streetcar was announced.

Yet streetcar detractors are numerous, including popular blogger Matthew Yglesias, who calls the under-construction Washington DC streetcar “the worst transit project in America.” Yglesias argues that it doesn't provide any transportation advantage, although he acknowledges that streetcars offer real estate benefits. Yglesias fails to understand a concept that I call Place Mobility, which can be defined as the ability of a dynamic, mixed-use, urban place to enable people to get to where they need to go efficiently in a variety of ways.

In such a place, such as in the Pearl District of Portland, people can get around on foot — or perhaps bike — for half of their daily trips and sometimes more. The most efficient kind of trip is when you don't get into a car, bus, or train. The streetcar built the place, in a sense, and *the place itself* offers the transportation advantage.

A CATALYST FOR DEVELOPMENT

The Portland streetcar has been a catalyst for \$4 billion-plus investment and up to 10,000 housing units in the Pearl District and other neighborhoods close to downtown. All of these people and businesses have Place Mobility. They use the streetcar for quick trips and to make connections — it doesn't matter that the tram moves very slowly because they don't have to go far. But new people and businesses in the Pearl and downtown are not the only beneficiaries. All of the existing businesses and residents also benefit from rising Place Mobility.

When a streetcar—or other catalyst—creates a compact, dynamic place, other kinds of mobility become possible. The densest concentrations of bike-share and car-share stations in Portland are located in the area served by the streetcar. That's no coincidence. These services thrive in dense urban environments.

Place Mobility is not just a vague or airy concept. It now can be measured with Walk Score. As an investment like a streetcar is installed, and new businesses and people move in, the Walk Score (walkscore.com) rises. The economic activities and efficiency in moving between those activities rise, because everything is in closer proximity. The land values also shoot up. That's tangible evidence of Place Mobility.

Place Mobility gets people where they need to go quickly and efficiently, but just not very fast. The not-very-fast part bothers people like Yglesias.

Here's another factor—people like streetcars. That often results in higher ridership. In Portland, where they replaced buses, the ridership was six to seven times higher. Mobility rises when more people ride mass transit. More people ride when they like mass transit.

The capital expenses for streetcar lines, according to Yglesias, are \$30 million to \$40 million per mile. That's pretty expensive—unless each line results in many hundreds of millions, or even billions, of dollars in economic development that revives the sense of place along a corridor.

None of this is meant to denigrate buses, or buses with dedicated lanes, which Yglesias supports. Buses are tremendously important for transportation in America.

But streetcars also have a place. Where they offer significant potential to boost Place Mobility, they should be seriously considered. They should be evaluated on their true impact on a place over time.

Streetcars are less a mass transit tool than a placemaking tool. At its best, placemaking itself is mobility—and it may be the most efficient kind. ♦

Walkable places improve health, safety, social life

A meta-analysis published in Housing Policy Debate finds that extensive studies in recent years support positive claims.

A review of hundreds of articles and nearly 100 peer-reviewed study finds that compact, walkable neighborhoods “have been found to have significant, positive effects for urban dwellers, in terms of social interaction, health, and safety.”

The analysis by Emily Talen and Julia Koschinsky of Arizona State University — *Compact, Walkable, Diverse Neighborhoods: Assessing Effects on Residents* — was published in the August issue of *Housing Policy Debate*. Walkable, compact, and diverse (WCD) neighborhoods — Talen and Koschinsky’s term — have been heavily studied in recent years, especially in the health field. “Of the 95 examples included in the table, 62 percent were in health journals, 28 percent in planning/design, and 10 percent in transportation,” the authors note.

The results were as follows:

- Fifty studies positively linked health benefits to CWD neighborhoods, while zero showed mostly negative effects. Fourteen found no clear negative or positive effect.
- Eleven studies positively linked social benefits to CWD neighborhoods, while one showed mostly negative effects. One found no clear negative or positive effect.
- Twelve studies positively linked safety benefits to CWD neighborhoods, while zero showed mostly negative effects. Five found no clear negative or positive effect.

While there remains “a need for significant caution about giving physical urban form too much import,” the authors find that social scientists are often too shy about recommending CWD as a tool. “In the United States especially, many social critics are reluctant to use urban form as an appropriate focus of policy intervention (see Hall, 2002). Some researchers have noted that there remains a disconnect between neighborhoods viewed in purely social terms and neighborhoods viewed as physical settings (Roman & Chalfin, 2008; Singh, Siahpush, & Kogan, 2010; Wen & Zhang,

2009). Social scientists often focus on the strong links that can be made between social and spatial isolation (Massey & Denton, 1993), emphasizing the neighborhood as the context of social problems, from high unemployment (Granovetter, 1990) to crime (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997), but the connection to CWD neighborhood form is not exploited as a potential way to address these problems.”

Only 14 percent of neighborhoods

in the 359 US metropolitan regions are “places where most errands can be accomplished on foot” according to data from the website Walk Score, the authors note. The study does not consider the difficulty of the challenge of making more US neighborhoods walkable.

“The challenge is to fully exploit the transformative power of what the CWD neighborhood can do, without overstepping the bounds and expecting more than can be delivered,” they note. ♦

San Francisco, New York, DC may be more affordable than you thought

KAID BENFIELD

Highly enlightening new data from the New York City-based Citizens Budget Commission demonstrate the immense importance of walkability and transit in shaping how affordable large US cities are for a range of household types. When typical housing and transportation costs are considered together and measured against incomes, cities generally thought to be relatively unaffordable because of high rents — such as San Francisco and New York — actually turn out to be more affordable than sprawling cities because of the high cost of driving in spread-out locations.

For example, San Francisco, Washington, DC and New York City have relatively high housing costs, all ranking in the top seven of 22 large US cities studied by the CBC. But all also rank among the lowest-cost cities for transportation, because of their relative urban density, facilitating walking, and their extensive and heavily used mass transit networks.

The authors explain:

“Because low transportation costs help balance the relatively higher price of housing in New York City, it ranks ninth lowest among the 22 cities in combined housing and transportation costs. Location costs total \$20,452 in New York City compared to the lowest costs in Philadelphia (\$19,283) and the highest costs in San Jose (\$29,337).

“The relatively low transportation costs combine with relatively high incomes to boost New York City’s overall location affordability. New York is the third most

affordable city for a typical household, behind Washington, D.C. and San Francisco.”

The least affordable cities when housing and transportation costs are combined and compared to household income turn out to be Sun Belt cities: Riverside, California; Miami; and Jacksonville. Those cities also have the study’s highest transportation costs for a typical household, because of high rates of driving and relatively low use of mass transit.

The 45 percent of income threshold for combined housing and transportation affordability was developed by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development as part of its Location Affordability Index. The database and criteria build upon the spectacular Housing + Transportation Affordability Index created by the Chicago-based Center for Neighborhood Technology.

The CBC findings on city affordability become considerably richer when analyzed for a range of different income levels and types of households. The Commission looked at seven household types, including three low-income (family, single worker, and very low-income single worker) categories and four moderate- and middle-income categories.

For the three low-income household types, cities of all kinds were generally unaffordable — the study average above the 45 percent threshold. Alarmingly, for very low-income single workers earning wages at the poverty line, every city studied showed combined housing and transportation costs near or above 100

percent of typical incomes.

Still, in all categories there was considerable variation among the cities. For the important category of low-income families, San Francisco and Washington both came in with typical housing and transportation costs (just) below 45 percent of typical incomes, at 42 and 43 percent, respectively. All other cities were above the affordability threshold, with San Antonio the most expensive at 71 percent of typical income. In general, the relatively better-performing cities were the ones with the most density and best networks of transportation options.

For all four categories of moder-

ate- and middle-income households, Washington ranked most affordable of the cities studied. Other relatively good performers across all four groups were, you guessed it, Philadelphia and San Francisco; Seattle and New York also did particularly well. Riverside came in last in all four categories. ♦

Kaid Benfield is special counsel for urban solutions at the Natural Resources Defense Council. This blog also appeared on NRDC Switchboard. Benfield's latest book is People Habitat: 25 Ways to Think About Greener, Healthier Cities.

physical environment it is regulating. While a FBC can be precise enough to regulate a very detailed and complex historic context, that same system can be fitted with fewer dials for other areas.

FBC isn't zoning and doesn't address land use. If your FBC doesn't directly address allowed land uses or clearly rely on other land use regulations, it is an incomplete FBC. Some early FBCs were prepared as CC&Rs (covenants, conditions, and restrictions) because of particular development objectives, and some well-intended early FBCs oversimplified use restrictions. Since then, FBCs have augmented or fully replaced existing zoning, including land use requirements.

FBC results in "by-right" approval and eliminates "helpful thinking by staff." With so much emphasis on how FBCs simplify the process, it's understandable that this perception has caused concern. Throughout the FBC process, focus is placed on delegating the various approvals to the approval authority at the lowest level practical. I've seen few codes that make everything "by right" over the counter. The choice of how much process each permit requires is up to each community. Through a careful FBC process, staff knowledge and experience does go into the code content through shaping or informing actual standards and procedures.

FBC results in "high-density residential." FBC does not mandate high-density

Misconceptions

FROM PAGE 1

conventional zoning and form-based zoning provisions under one cover, in one set of procedures.

FBC is a template that you have to make your community conform to. Untrue. *Conventional zoning*, with its focus on separation of uses and its prohibition of ostensibly undesirable activities, often conflicted with the very places it was intended to protect. Perhaps what some refer to negatively as a form-based code's "template" is the *kit of parts* that repeats from one community to another—the streets, civic spaces, buildings, frontages, signage, and so forth. But a form-based code is guided by how each of those components looks and feels in a particular community. The FBC responds to your community's character.

FBC is too expensive. FBCs require more effort than conventional zoning—but then, conventional zoning doesn't ask as many questions. FBCs reveal and thoroughly address topics that conventional zoning doesn't even attempt. Some communities augment conventional zoning with design guidelines; those guidelines aren't always included in the cost comparison, and in my experience they don't fully resolve the issues. A FBC has the virtue of ensuring that your policy work will directly inform the zoning standards. Further, the the upfront cost of properly writing a FBC pales in comparison to the cumulative cost of policy plans that don't really say anything, zoning

changes that require the applicant to point out reality, hearings, and litigation over projects. Further, the cumulative cost of policy plans that don't really say anything, zoning changes that require the applicant to point out reality, hearings, and litigation over projects pales in comparison to the upfront cost of properly writing a FBC.

FBC is only for historic districts. FBCs can be applied to all kinds of places. Granted, they are uniquely capable of fully addressing the needs of a historic district because of their ability to "see and calibrate" all of the components. Such a FBC works with not instead of local historic procedures and state requirements. This is in contrast to conventional zoning's focus on process and lack of correspondence with the

Form-based codes encourages a wide variety of housing types, such as quadplexes—not just high-density residential units.



residential.” Instead, it identifies housing of all types—from single-family houses to quadplexes, courtyards, rowhouses, and lofts over retail—and explains their performance characteristics. Density is one of many such characteristics. Through the FBC process, communities receive more information and decide which kinds of buildings they want and where. FBCs enable higher density housing—where it is desired by the community—to fit into the larger context of the community’s vision.

FBC requires mixed-use in every building regardless of context or viability. Conventional zoning has applied mile upon redundant mile of commercial zoning, resulting in an oversupply of such land and many marginal or vacant sites. By contrast, FBCs identify a palette of mixed-use centers to punctuate corridors and concentrate services within walking distance of residents and for those arriving by other transportation modes. FBCs identify the components; it’s up to the community to choose which components fit best and are

most viable in each context.

FBC can’t work with design guidelines, and complicates staff review of projects. Because conventional zoning doesn’t ask a lot of questions, most planners have had to learn what they know about design on the job, and need design guidelines to fill in the gaps left open by the zoning. That’s how I learned. A well-prepared FBC doesn’t need design guidelines because it explicitly addresses the variety of issues through clear illustrations, language, and numerous examples. However, we are not allergic to design guidelines; the key is to make sure that the guidelines clarify what is too complex, variable, or discretionary to state in legally binding standards.

I’m enthusiastic about FBC and regard it as a far better tool than conventional zoning for walkable urban places. However, it’s still zoning, and it needs people to set its priorities and parameters. It needs people to review plans and compare them with its regulations. Having a FBC will require internal adjustments by the planning de-

partment and other key departments, such as Public Works.

Form-based coding began in response to the aspirations of a few visionary architects and developers who wanted to build genuine, lasting places, based on the patterns of great local communities. Unresponsive zoning regulations often erected insurmountable barriers to these proposals and made proposals for sprawl the path of least resistance.

From its outset nearly 35 years ago, form-based coding exposed the inabilities of conventional zoning to efficiently address the needs of today’s communities. Today, form-based coding is a necessary zoning reform—one of several important tools that communities need to position themselves as serious candidates for reinvestment. ♦

Tony Perez is director of form-based coding for Opticos Design Inc. in Berkeley, California.

Chief of placemaking

FROM PAGE 1

of lifestyle and are willing to live in that lifestyle” whether or not they have a job at first.

Businesses locate where they can find talent, Heidel says. “It’s no longer the case that businesses locate just to get tax breaks or things like that. They have to be able to know they can attract talent for their industries.”

Michigan is among the nation’s leaders in high-tech and research and development and, thanks to its automotive industry, has more than its share of Fortune 500 companies. In this economy, however, places like Detroit, Grand Rapids, Lansing, and Kalamazoo have to compete on quality of life with Chicago, Minneapolis, or New York, he says.

Strategic placemaking uses development, with targeted infrastructure improvements, to create a sense of place. One example is downtown Detroit, where more than 10,000 jobs have been added in recent years. Billionaire Dan Gilbert has purchased at least 34 large properties, including many old skyscrapers, and fixed them up. Infrastructure investments on the waterfront and in parks have contributed to a remarkable transformation in a two-square-mile area. Smaller to mid-sized Michigan cities like Birmingham and Grand Rapids have also seen significant investment downtown.

Real estate developer and theorist Christopher Leinberger argues that the trend toward “walkable urban” places will drive the market in coming decades. Real estate represents more than a third of US assets and more than double the New York Stock Exchange and NASDAQ combined, he says. The walkable urban trend is all about placemaking and this will help lead the economy, he explains. Michigan has devised a



Gary Heidel, with Lansing and the state capitol in the background

statewide strategy to ride this wave.

FOCUS ON COMMUNITIES

Municipalities are receptive to this message, Heidel says, “because traditional economic development has not always worked out well for them.”

“We provide resources to help them organize to do the planning and visioning, and we offer tools that will enable investment in the area – particularly housing,” says Heidel.

MSHDA stresses “development planning, not planning for development.” What’s the difference? Most municipalities do the latter, he says: “You create a plan and hope for the development to come.” With strategic placemaking, he says, the tools are assembled to facilitate place-based development within a short time frame — say, two years. Beyond that, plans get out

of date relative to the market.

Placemaking is local, yet it is influenced by state policies in housing, transportation, economic development, parks, and other areas. It involves public investment that leverages private investment. Michigan's placemaking initiative called MIplace (see May-June 2014 and June 2012 issue of *Better Cities & Towns*) touches on all of these areas.

MIplace began in 2012 with the Sense of Place Council, a 40 member statewide coalition of trade groups representing nonprofits, entrepreneurs, lenders, developers, historic preservation, arts and culture, recreation, planners, health, representatives from state and local government, and academia.

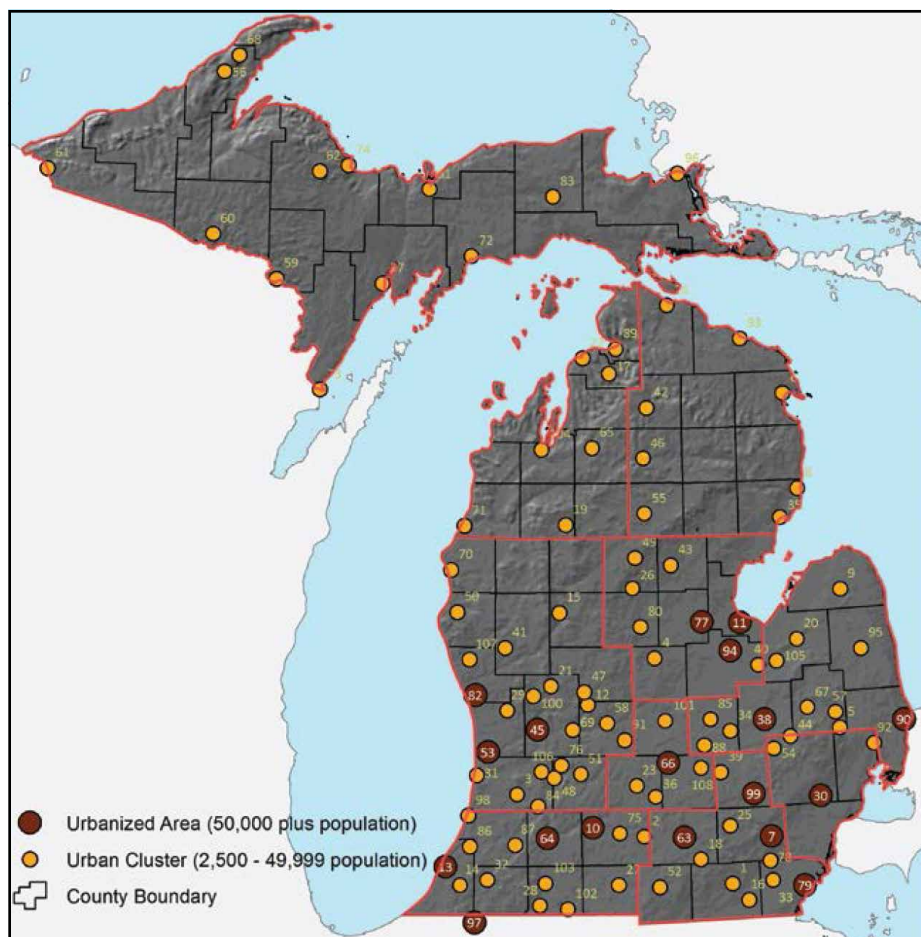
Heidel co-chairs this council along with Dan Gilmartin, CEO of the Michigan Municipal League, which hashes out place-based policies that government can pursue. MIplace came out of the Sense of Place Council.

COORDINATION OF STATE GOVERNMENT

Within state government, Heidel chairs the Interdepartmental Collaboration Committee (ICC) Placemaking Partnership Subcommittee (PPS), which brings together the state departments that impact place. Members include MSHDA, which oversees housing programs, the Department of Transportation, the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), the Department of Natural Resources with its Transect-based parks program, the Department of Environmental Quality and its brownfields program, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Michigan Land Bank Authority. "The overarching goal of the ICC-PPS is that Michigan's economic development and placemaking activities will produce jobs, spur regional economies, and elevate the quality of life for all our state's citizens," according to the ICC's 2011 annual report.

Republican governor Rick Snyder came into office that year and has made placemaking a policy platform. "From almost the get-go, the governor has defined placemaking as a key ingredient to econ development," says Heidel, who has been with MSHDA since 1986.

How does this work locally? MIplace has essentially "reverse engineered" the process of placemaking — which



Michigan urbanized areas (red circles) and urban clusters (yellow dots)

requires strategic investment and development in mixed-use corridors and urban centers. A form-based code with administrative review creates a land-use entitlement system that developers can easily respond to.

The foundation of the program is education. The state has created a placemaking curriculum that has already trained more than 10,000 people in the public and private sectors in the last year and a half. The curriculum has three levels—from nonprofessionals to architects and developers. "We have to change the dialog in the state about this new movement related to economic development and jobs and the role that place plays in that," says Heidel. Placemaking is usually delayed "not by intention, but because people don't know the next steps," he explains.

MEDC launched a "Redevelopment Ready Communities" (RRC) program in 2014. As of March 2014, 31 communities were participating in the program, and more than 30 additional communities expressing interest. Communities must

take steps to show that they are ready for strategic placemaking. "There is recognition on the part of local communities that they need to do something to expedite development," Heidel says.

The carrot is that RRC designation allows a community to receive priority status in interagency state investments, he says. A community can also be selected for a "place plan," whereby MML and the Land Policy Institute at Michigan State University will assist in providing tools to prepare a key corridor for redevelopment. The charrette process, with full stakeholder engagement, is the cornerstone for creating the vision for place-based development.

MSHDA emphasizes target market analysis (TMA), which analyzes the potential markets and ties them to building types that are not always adequately supplied. These include apartment buildings of various sizes, mixed-use buildings, townhouses, multiplexes, courtyard buildings and others that may not show up in traditional market studies that look at what has sold or

leased in the past.

MIplace applies to communities of all sizes, Heidel says. Small towns see themselves as rural, but according to the analysis of the rural-urban Transect, they are actually collections of urban neighborhoods surrounded by rural land. “Once that connection is made” in the minds of local officials, “they see they can connect to the program, the process, and the financial support.” Many Redevelopment Ready Communities are small towns.

Michigan has 18 urbanized areas with at least 50,000 people, all with downtowns and existing and/or potential mixed-use corridors. It also has 90 “urban clusters” of 2,500 to 49,999 people, all with some kind of mixed-use center (see map), including 13 in the Upper Peninsula. All of these have placemaking potential.

Michigan’s program is unique, but other states that have expressed interest include Pennsylvania, Iowa, Wisconsin, Nebraska, and Indiana. Governor Snyder co-chairs the Great Lakes Commission, an interstate agency that meets on issues related to the region. The states share common issues such as economically distressed industrial cities. “We have been talking about different strategies, including placemaking as the cornerstone of economic development,” Heidel says.

Other states may incorporate pieces of Michigan’s strategy for generating walkable urban places — a practical approach that is translated into language that local officials can understand. Placemaking is simply “good development projects,” he says. “All of these programs can create economic development on their own but if you bring them together that can be powerful.” ♦

Four types of placemaking

MARK A. WYCKOFF

The many uses of the term “placemaking” are confusing and contradictory. This undermines the term’s ability to help neighborhoods and communities imagine and create a better future.

The simplest definition is as follows: “Placemaking is the process of creating quality places that people want to live, work, play, and learn in.”

Placemaking is a process. It is a means to an end: the creation of Quality Places.

What exactly is a Quality Place? I would characterize it as a building, location, or space that possesses a strong sense of place. It is a structure or space where people, businesses, and institutions want to be. Such places often are alluring; they have pizzazz.

Places of this sort have been around for centuries, responding to innate human needs and desires. But as technology advances and other aspects of life evolve, new facets are sometimes added. The key elements of Quality Places today, I would argue, are these:

- A mix of uses
- Effective public spaces
- Broadband capability
- Multiple transportation options
- Multiple housing options
- Preservation of historic structures
- Respect community heritage
- Arts, culture, and creativity
- Recreation
- Green space
- Quiet, unless they are designed to be otherwise.

Quality Places are active and unique sites—interesting, visually attractive, and often incorporating public art and creative activities. They have pleasing façades and good building dimensions relative to the street, and are people-friendly.

Quality Places embody good form, which includes:

- Mass, density, and scale that are appropriate to their location on the rural-urban Transect
- Human scale
- Walkable and bikable streets and trails.

These form characteristics result in Quality Places that are:

- Safe
- Connected
- Welcoming
- Conducive to authentic experiences
- Accessible; people can easily circulate within and to and from these locations
- Comfortable; they address cleanliness, character, and charm
- Sociable; they have a physical fabric that encourages people to connect with one another
- Able to promote and facilitate civic engagement.

Inherent in the above description is a simple formula: Proper physical form plus a mix of uses and functions plus a mix of social opportunity leads to positive activities and a strong sense of place.

Comparison for four types of placemaking

The Problem	The Solution	The Payoffs
Standard Placemaking Communities are not effectively using public spaces to create vital, vibrant and livable communities that people want to live, work, play, and learn in.	Broad public and stakeholder engagement in revitalizing, reusing, and creating public spaces using short and long term techniques rooted in social engagement and new urbanist design principles.	More quality places with quality activities and a strong sense of place. More vital, vibrant and livable public spaces, communities and regions that residents, businesses and visitors care deeply about.
Strategic Placemaking Communities are not competitive in attracting and retaining talented workers.	Revitalization that increases housing and transportation choices, and urban amenities to attract talented workers.	Faster gains in livability, population, diversity, jobs, income and educational attainment, than by standard placemaking.
Creative Placemaking American cities, suburbs and small towns confront structural changes and residential uprooting.	Revitalization by creative initiatives that animate places and spark economic development.	Gains in livability, diversity, jobs and income. Innovative products and services for the cultural industries.
Tactical Placemaking Many physical improvements are expensive and policy-makers are understandably reluctant to commit resources due to uncertain risks.	Test various solutions using low cost proxies to gauge effectiveness and public support.	The public and policy-makers can actually see the result and degree of support for various options before committing permanent resources.

A place analogy we use that resonates with many people is:

- Form creates the Stage
- Activity is the Play
- Response is how you Feel about the Play
- The Economic outcome is good if the Play makes Money (allowing nearby businesses to prosper)
- Sense of Place is strong if the above are true.

TYPES OF PLACEMAKING

Placemaking comes in more than one variety.

In most instances, placemaking — what I would call “standard placemaking” — is an incremental method of improving a location over a long period of time through many separate small projects or activities. The Project for Public Spaces (PPS) has long been an advocate of this approach.

However, placemaking can also be called upon to create and implement larger-scale transformative projects and activities—converting a location in a short period of time into one that exudes a strong sense of place and serves as a magnet for people and new development. Complete streets, form-based coding, and New Urbanism foster this kind of placemaking.

There are three varieties of specialized placemaking:

- Strategic Placemaking (as advocated by Michigan’s MIplace Partnership Initiative).
- Creative Placemaking (as advocated by the National Endowment of the Arts, the US Conference of Mayors, and the American Architectural Foundation).
- Tactical Placemaking (as advocated by Street Plans Collaborative and PPS).

The three specialized types of placemaking focus on:

- Specific quality of life improvements
- Achieving outcomes at specific scales and time periods, or
- Ways to try some things out [test strategies] before committing significant money and other resources.

All forms of placemaking depend on broad engagement of stakeholders to design projects and activities. This requires engaging and empowering people to participate in the process. The types of projects include downtown street and façade improvements, neighborhood-based projects such as residential rehabilitation, residential infill, and mixed-use projects, and improvements to parks and public spaces.

Strategic placemaking is targeted to a particular goal in addition to creation of Quality Places. It may aim to develop places that are uniquely attractive to talented workers, that attract businesses, and that catalyze substantial job creation and income growth. This adaptation of placemaking especially targets knowledge workers who, because of their skills, can choose to live anywhere and who tend to pick Quality Places offering certain amenities.

Strategic Placemaking is pursued collaboratively by public, nonprofit and private sectors over a period of 5 to 15 years, often in downtowns and at nodes along key corridors. The term was coined by the Land Policy Institute at Michigan State University based on research into why communities are gaining or losing population, jobs, and income.

Creative Placemaking was coined by Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa in a 2010 report by that name for the National Endowment for the Arts. Creative Placemaking focuses on museums and orchestra halls and housing for artists and new cultural activities such as public art displays, outdoor

concerts, movies in the park, and installations such as transit stations with art themes. Markusen and Gadwa wrote:

“In creative placemaking, partners from public, private, non-profit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities. Creative placemaking animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired.”

Tactical placemaking brings together “Tactical Urbanism,” (described in books by the Street Plans Collaborative) and the PPS’s “Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper” approach, which uses a term coined by Eric Reynolds of Urban Space Management.

Tactical Urbanism is described as “Incremental, small-scale improvements” employed to “stage more substantial investments.” This approach allows a host of local actors to test new concepts before making substantial political and financial commitments. Sometimes sanctioned, sometimes not, the actions are commonly referred to as “guerrilla urbanism,” “pop-up urbanism,” “city repair,” or “D.I.Y urbanism.”

Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper is described by PPS as a process to activate public spaces in a way that is “lower risk and lower cost, capitalizing on the creative energy of the community to efficiently generate new uses and revenue for places in transition. ... We often start with Amenities and Public Art, followed by Event and Intervention Projects, which lead to Light Development strategies for long-term change.” This approach favors “use over design and comprehensive construction,” to “strike a balance between providing comfortable spaces for people to enjoy while generating the revenue necessary for maintenance and management.”

Tactical placemaking is a phased approach that can start quickly, often at low cost. It targets public spaces and can be implemented continuously in neighborhoods with a mix of stakeholders. Projects may include a temporary road diet using paint, the pilot construction of a new form of dwelling in a neighborhood, or temporary conversion of a storage facility into a business. Activities include parking space conversions, self-guided historic walks, and outdoor music events in town squares.

WHAT TYPE OF PLACEMAKING TO USE

In an era of limited funds and resources, selecting the best placemaking approach for the community and situation is critical. The Table on page 7 offers problems, solutions, and payoffs for these approaches. Over time, a community may need to use all of the differing approaches. They can be implemented in combination or separately, simultaneously or sequentially, depending on particular objectives and opportunities. ♦

Mark A. Wyckoff, FAICP, is a professor at the Michigan State University Land Policy Institute. This article is a shorter, edited version of one that was written to support Michigan’s placemaking curriculum created as part of the public/private MIplace Partnership Initiative (miplace.org). A book on these types of placemaking with a focus on the use of placemaking for economic development purposes will be available in the first quarter of 2015.

Place-based development and streetcar transforming downtown Tucson

Tucson's Sunlink streetcar opened in July 25, linking University of Arizona and its Health Sciences Center to the Fourth Avenue corridor, downtown, and a redevelopment district called Mercado.

Since the "modern streetcar" was announced in 2006, more than \$1.5 billion in investment has occurred along its route, including housing, restaurants, offices, and retail, according to the US Department of Transportation.

"Since 2006, when Tucson voters approved the \$2.1 billion Regional Transportation Plan that included the modern streetcar, downtown has seen aggressive redevelopment that has brought dozens of new restaurants, night clubs, bars and shops which have transformed it into a vibrant entertainment district," the *Daily Sun* reported.

Similar stories have played out in many cities like Portland, Seattle, Atlanta, and Tampa that have installed streetcars (and taken many other steps including planning, infrastructure investments, and tax-increment financing) that resulted in big private investment.

The Mercado District is of particular interest to urbanists, including a new 14-acre neighborhood built of southwest adobe homes with narrow, winding streets.

This eight-block plan with seven small plazas, designed by Moule & Polyzoides, and Oscar Machado, won a CNU Charter Award in 2006.

Like a lot of developments of the time, it suffered during the real estate downtown. Rio Development defaulted on a bank loan in 2011, according to the *Arizona Daily Star*, but was able to buy time. The developer held on and now their project is surging ahead. The built result is, objectively, pretty fabulous.

Architect Stefanos Polyzoides described the Mercado planning and building process:

1. A master plan enabled the incremental execution of the project in a variety of products of different sizes, from single family houses to row houses, to courtyard housing to stacked flats over retail to plain stacked flats.

2. A development code established zoning and develop-



Tucson Sunlink. Photo by Martha Lochert.

ment standards and is compatible with the current building codes as regulated by the City of Tucson. Pulling a permit is streamlined. 3. An architectural language was invented during the charrette that is regional in its underlying material, construction method and environmental performance dimensions.

4. Four small builders bought lots and designed their own houses working directly with their end users. Because of the recession, there was no spec building and therefore no spec design.

5. Some of their projects were corrected in drawing form by Moule & Polyzoides for adherence to the project language and code. Individual interpretations were encouraged across a wide spectrum.

6. Each building drew from the rich experience and interests of the builders with alternative forms of construction, such as adobe, rammed earth, etc, and their practice of inexpensive, passive means of environmental control.

7. Each project was approved by a Design Committee composed of Moule & Polyzoides, the developer, and one of the

Mercado Phase 2 plan, below, and completed housing, right.



design/ builders, Tom Wuelpern. Key criteria are beyond the individual character of single buildings and refer to the whole place. They include choice of frontages, a rich fabric of building and a diverse color palette.

Thirty homes are built and 10 more under construction, and larger buildings are in the pipeline.

The redevelopment area was cleared in 1960s urban renewal.

Sunlink ridership

In its first three days of operation when no fare was charged, Sunlink averaged 20,000 riders daily, a level that surprised everyone. As fares were

instituted (\$1.50 per ride, \$4 daily pass), ridership dropped to 3,200, which is 88 percent of the long-term daily projection. These first-week numbers were prior to the return of university students for the fall semester.

The Sunlink streetcars were built in Portland — the first system to be launched with US-built streetcars in 60 years.

Downtown Tucson and adjacent neighborhoods appear to be roaring back to life with new investment and the rail transit connections. ♦

Form-based code adopted to redevelop Connecticut business campus

The Hartford, a Fortune 500 insurance and investment firm based in Hartford, Connecticut, is using form-based coding to spur redevelopment of its 173-acre former business campus (see plan at upper right).

The Town of Simsbury, in Hartford County, recently adopted a form-based code for the site. The Hartford wants to sell the prime real estate for redevelopment. The firm worked with the town on the code, crafted by Gateway Planning Group of Dallas, Texas.

“This is breaking new ground in terms of using a design process to calibrate a form-based code so that the business interest of the property owner and the public’s interests are brought together,” Scott Polikov, principal of Gateway Planning Group, told the *Hartford Business Journal*.

“It’s a unique way of doing it and an extremely good model,” Joel Russell, executive director of the Form-Based Codes Institute based in Chicago, told the *Journal*.

Simsbury, a town with 23,511 people, was entirely rural prior to the second half of the 20th Century. Development consists mostly of low-density subdivisions—the town’s Walk Score is 15, defined as “almost all errands require a car.” Services are strung out along a state highway, Route 202, Hopmeadow Street—which is where The Hartford’s former office campus is located.

On 40 acres of the site is The Hartford’s four-story, 641,000 square foot

building, now vacant.

The code sets the stage for walkable urban redevelopment of the site, which would create the first urban center in Simsbury.

The *Journal* reports that \$175,000 was spent to design and code the site, including a charrette with full public input and market research. The town spent \$30,000 and the rest was provided by The Hartford. The plan and the code are designed to increase the value of the property and, ultimately, tax revenues to the town when it is redeveloped.

“With input from key stakeholders and the public, several short and long term development scenarios were derived, including a whole health village anchored by healthcare and continuing care retirement facilities, a farm-to-table eco-village anchored by community agriculture, bioscience, and related manufacturing facilities, and a university or educational institution anchored mixed-use village,” according to the code summary.

“In creating a vibrant vision for redevelopment and the corresponding zoning tool ... the Town is committed to supporting the long-term evolution of a single-use campus site into a pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use development environment that can adapt over time to shifting demands without rezoning, while allowing for reuse of the existing building and campus for a wide variety of development opportunities,” the report says. ♦



Scenario for redevelopment of The Hartford’s Simsbury campus.

BOOK REVIEW

Why I Walk Taking a Step in the Right Direction

By Kevin Klinkenberg

New Society Publishers, 2014, 166 pages, \$14.95 paperback

REVIEW BY ROBERT STEUTEVILLE

Why do I walk? For health. For connection to community and nature. To save money. Just because I like walking.

Kevin Klinkenberg, an architect in Savannah, Georgia, has turned this simple question—with the help of his deep understanding of places and urban design—into an engaging book called *Why I Walk: Taking a Step in the Right Direction*.

Why I Walk is a personal book on the importance of walkability in community design—assisted by a dozen of his friends and colleagues (disclosure: many are also my friends and colleagues), who offer their own personal stories.

BOOK REVIEW

This book is not technical or moral in tone. Klinkenberg is not making the case that cars are bad or calling for collective action against sprawl. He urges readers to take *personal* action, which is very different. *Why I Walk* makes a compelling argument, in a down-to-Earth point way, on a subject that is too often obscured in jargon.

Klinkenberg explains in clear language the aspects of the built environment that make it walkable, bikable, and conducive to transit. On the rare cases where jargon is unavoidable, it is explained in a “jargon alert.” It’s a little like a *Dummies* book without the annoying graphics.

Some of the best aspects of this book are the personal stories of the advantages of a walking and bicycling lifestyle.

“The move from suburb to city allowed me to trade in my 50-minute daily driving commute for a 20-minute walking commute,” says Stu Sirota, a planner in Baltimore with a wife and three children. He found he also had more options—a 10-minute bus trip or a 5-minute taxi ride. “The move also made owning two cars complete unnecessary, so we downsized to one without any sacrifice in convenience. In the process, we found that this change was saving us over \$8,000 annually.”

WALKING SAVES MONEY

That last point illustrates that, although Klinkenberg makes strong arguments for the freedom and health and social advan-

tages of living in a walkable place, many of the most powerful parts of the book are financial. Since moving to Savannah, Klinkenberg drives about 5,000 miles a year—while continuing to take many road trips—about a third of the average for an American adult. He outlines exactly what his expenses are, and shows why his after-tax expenditures on transportation have plummeted. “I have an extra five to six thousand dollars per year in my pocket compared to the average American. Not too shabby,” he writes. ... “The bottom line is one major reason I like to walk is *it saves me a lot of money.*”

Some of the stories focus on enjoyment. Karen Parolek, a design professional, talks about her daily bicycle commute. “I now own rain pants, a good rain jacket and rain fenders on my bike, so I can ride through puddles, spraying water everywhere.”

Klinkenberg is not judgmental about cars. He has always appreciated cars and road trips. “There is no point in denying ... getting in a car affords tremendous mobility.” The problem is that, over the years, we have become dependent. “We created a world based on the mobility that the car provided, but in a twist of fate gave ourselves far fewer options for total mobility.”

He admits to having road rage. He cites the old George Carlin joke. “Have you ever noticed that *anybody* driving *slower than you is an idiot*, and *anyone* going faster than you is a *maniac*?” On foot, he says, he is a nicer, less-stressed-out person.

Klinkenberg outlines the difficulties in more people living

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BOOK REVIEW

a lifestyle that allows them to walk, among them:

- There aren't enough walkable places.
- Our workplaces are scattered far and wide.
- Too many of the best shopping options are located in far-away areas that require a car to get there.
- Schools in many walkable places aren't good. ("The problem stems from our legacy of racial and social issues.")
- Crime and safety are real issues. (Although the reality is that automobile accidents are the biggest cause of death and injury of children and young adults, "the cocoon of a car provides a tremendous psychological sense of protection," he explains.)

Despite those problems, he offers abundant strategies and arguments for how and why the reader can and should set up their lives to drive less and walk more. Part of it is simply a determination to do so. But the most effective step you can take is to move to a walkable community. "That's right, I'm telling you to pack up and relocate. It's not as difficult as you think."

With or without reading *Why I Walk*, more and more Americans are deciding to do just that. ♦

UPDATE

■ Transportation Engineers Norman Garrick of the University of Connecticut and Wesley Marshall of the University of Colorado reported in the current *Journal of Transport and Health* that **more compact street networks lead to better health,**

UPDATE

specifically lower levels of high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, and obesity.

Garrick and Marshall studied 24 medium-sized California cities, from 30,000 to 150,000 in population. Some of the cities were mostly built prior to 1950, with dense street networks, and others mostly built after 1950, with sprawling, disjointed networks. In January, 2009, *Better Cities & Towns* (then *New Urban News*), first reported previous Garrick and Marshall findings in these same cities: The cities built after 1950 suffered a rate of traffic fatalities more than three times higher than the older cities. (About 10.1 per year per 100,000 population versus 3.1 per year per 100,000 population in the years 1997 through 2005.)

■ **OppSites**, a new website for urban redevelopment, is planning a September launch. Cities can use the site, oppsites.com, to map and share local knowledge about what they want to see built and where. The investment community leverages this information to find underexposed development opportunities that support community goals.

OppSites CEO and cofounder Ian Ross has been working to revitalize cities since 1999. Cofounder and COO Tomas Janusas joined the OppSites team along with CMO Sarah Filley, Cofounder of Popuphood, to solve the economic development challenges faced by cities of all sizes.

■ **Whittaker builders**, the developer of New Town at St. Charles, Missouri, is seeking to build another major traditional

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U R B A N D E S I G N A S S O C I A T E S

UPDATE

neighborhood development (TND). Whittaker has come a long way back from filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy on New Town at St. Charles in 2009 after the bank called the loan in the midst of the housing crash. Whittaker held on to the core of that project and continues to develop it.

The 145-acre New Town at Harmony development in Independence, Missouri, is going through zoning approvals. "Homes by Whittaker's plans call for nearly 900 homes and apartments, along with neighborhood commercial and an elementary school within the project. New Town at Harmony is being designed using principles of New Urbanism, which promotes compact, walkable, mixed-use projects," according to the *Kansas City Business Journal*.

■ More than six years after a public charrette that created the concept "agrarian urbanism," the Southlands development in Tsawwassen, British Columbia, was approved by the Metro Vancouver government.

The plan has been greatly altered by the Duany Plater-Zyberk (DPZ) design 2008 charrette — the amount of housing units has been halved to 950 from the original 2,000. About 80 percent of the 538-acre parcel along the US-Canada border will be maintained as farmland.

Land-use consultant Bob Ransford, who was involved in the original charrette, called the plan "modified but with all of the key principles intact." The developer is The Century Group.

The idea is to design and build the neighborhood around food culture and production. The center of the new development will be a "market square" where produce can be sold. The design of the neighborhood, including building types, blocks, and public spaces, is geared toward food production.

■ Making downtown **Albuquerque**, New Mexico, more walkable doesn't have to cost a bundle, according to consultant Jeff Speck.

The author of *Walkable City* delivered a report to the city, which included the following recommendations, according to the *Albuquerque Journal*:

- Replace 19 low-volume traffic lights with stop signs.
- Narrow standard 12-foot travel lanes to 10 feet. "This extra (lane) width does nothing except to encourage speeding," he said. "It doesn't improve the flow."
- Convert two streets to two-way traffic from one-way.

- Provide more green space.
- Reduce the number of travel lanes on a few streets.
- Provide more on-street parking, which buffers pedestrians, and bicycle lanes. Reduction in lanes and lane widths will provide the space.
- Reduce the size of a major public space, Civic Plaza, which Speck says is too big to feel comfortable for pedestrians.
- Use every incentive to encourage more housing downtown.

■ **Mobile, Alabama, adopted form-based code** May, 2014, about a year and a half after a charrette was held by Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company. The code, as written, is short and looks a lot like a conventional code, except it has form standards and some illustrations.

"Mobile is a wonderful city: It's smaller and more damaged than New Orleans, but absolutely taking off and full of young people," notes Duany.

About half of downtown's urban fabric has been demolished over the years — so redevelopment sites are abundant, he notes. The plan covers two hundred blocks, including the central business district and surrounding residential and mixed-use areas.

■ A *Reuters* article reported this astonishing statistic: 23 million rides have been taken in **US bikeshare systems** since 2007 with no reported fatalities.

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The author first looked at New York City's Citibike program, and found no deaths in more than 10 million rides. The accident rate is equally impressive — less than 10 per million rides, with or without injuries. The author then investigated smaller bikeshare programs in 26 cities.

This is an amazing safety record considering that bikeshare programs do not provide helmets and attract novice riders including many tourists who are unfamiliar with the geography.

The article attributed the safety record to well-built, heavy

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16

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CNU to explore equity + transportation at NYC Summit

Join engineers, planners, designers, and public officials from across the U.S. at the 2014 CNU Project for Transportation Reform Summit October 1-3, 2014 at the Ford Foundation Building in New York City.

This year's Summit, Equity + Transportation, will focus on the interaction between equity and transportation and how to redefine transportation standards to support safe, vibrant, and equitable streets.

For decades, U.S. transportation policy gave priority to automobiles over the social and economic needs of the people living along our streets. Highways and wide arterials divided pre-existing neighborhoods, degraded the public realm, and created travel spaces unsafe for pedestrians and bicyclists. Much of CNU's transportation work — such as our Highways to Boulevards initiative and the CNU/ITE collaboration Designing Walkable Urban Thoroughfares — helps to reverse decades of inequity.

This three-day summit of presentations, discussions, tours, and working meetings will challenge participants to identify research opportunities, policy strategies, and design approaches that make transportation policy more holistic and equitable. These discussions around Equity + Transportation will form the basis of CNU's work on this topic for the upcoming year.

The purpose of the Summit is to explore the following questions:

1. How do we revitalize corridors in distressed communities?
2. How do we complete "incomplete" streets by building great, beautiful and equitable streets?

3. Is there a research, policy, or design gap in this area that CNU could address? If so, what?

Register online before September 26th, 2014. Find our more at www.cnu.org/transportation2014. ♦



Join CNU Illinois for the 7th annual statewide conference Sept. 25

CNU Illinois invites you to their 7th annual statewide conference, "Ready, Set, Plan!" Please join CNU Illinois for our seventh annual state conference, "Ready, Set, Plan!" The program will investigate the urban planning process with a series of case studies drawn from the southern and eastern communities of Chicago's metropolitan area. Our morning program will explore "The Region," "The City," and "The District" with presentations of the Millennium

Reserve, the Village of Park Forest, and Chicago's proposed Lakeside development. Our afternoon program will feature Downtown Orland Park's "Main Street,"

with a special emphasis on the "implementation" phase of the planning and development process. The conference will also include a midday Regional Heritage Luncheon. CNU Illinois members as well as non-members are invited to attend.

Go to EventBrite.com and search "CNU Illinois" to find out more. ♦



Provided to BCT courtesy of the Congress for the New Urbanism, The Marquette Bldg., 140 S. Dearborn, Ste. 404, Chicago, IL 60603. 312/551-7300. www.cnu.org

After the Mobility Revolution

A mobility revolution is right around the corner. According to Robin Chase, founder of ZipCar, it could be either heaven or hell. While much attention has been given to autonomous cars and car-sharing services, the possible consequences for our cities have largely been ignored. What are the possibilities for development, community, happiness, and prosperity when automobiles no longer dictate the shape of our cities? How can we ensure that the future is more like heaven than hell?

Join CNU New England, the Audi Urban Future Initiative and Philip Parsons, official US entrant of the Audi Urban Future Award 2014, in exploring how the urban environment can benefit from the mobility revolution. The event is from 10 am to 2 pm on Sept. 13, 2014, at The Center of Arts at the Armory in Somerville, MA.

This event is free and open to all. Lunch will be provided for registered participants. For more information and to register, visit usqmobility.splashthat.com. ♦



UPDATE

FROM PAGE 14

bikes with good brakes that work in all weather and are geared to limit speed. A good part of the safety is likely due to where these bikeshare programs are located within cities — downtowns and nearby neighborhoods where cars move relatively slowly.

Safety in numbers may also come into play. When bike share programs are instituted, it is safe to assume that the number of bicyclists on streets in specific parts of cities rises, which makes drivers more cautious.

■ **NorthWest Crossing**, a 486-acre traditional neighborhood development in Bend, Oregon, is now developing a “pocket neighborhood” inspired by the book written by Ross Chapin. The plans show 14 cottages, and most of the cottages are oriented toward a small, mid-block green space. The cottages, call The Commons at NorthWest Crossing, form a small community cluster within a larger neighborhood. The cottages range from 793 to 999 square feet.



Northwest Crossing “pocket neighborhood” plan

■ **Providence, Rhode Island**, has seen a slow, but steady, resurgence. Downtown, called Downcity, was virtually abandoned as a place to live through the 1990s. The urban center of a few hundred acres “almost doubled in population between 2000 and 2010 — from 2,678 people to 4,569. At least six buildings have been renovated into mixed-use developments and apartments since 2010, and they are practically full,” notes the Providence Journal.

Downcity includes the state capitol, plus scores of restaurants, cafes, and pubs, cultural attractions like theaters, shops, office buildings, institutions, and it is the city’s transportation hub.

In its architecture and narrow streets, Providence has a kind of 200-year-old charm that can be found in parts of only a few select American cities.

Downcity has benefited from many urban plans—all fo-

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cused on placemaking—since the 1990s. Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company created several of these plans with the support of local developer and urbanist Buff Chace, who has renovated many mixed-use buildings.

A couple of major urban design moves have helped the resurgence. The Providence River, a tidal inlet, was uncovered in the 1990s and has become a popular open space downtown. More recently, Interstate 95 was moved further south, reuniting Downcity with the Jewelry District, which is now being reinhabited. ♦

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