

How to make a Town

*From Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl
and the Decline of the American Dream (2000)*

Andrés Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and Jeff Speck

Editor's introduction

In June 2007, the *International Herald Tribune* ran a feature headlined "Twenty-five Examples of Good Urban Design" that declared: "It's not necessarily the billion-euro development, star-architect-designed gallery or shiny new Ferris wheel that makes locals feel good about their town . . . the measure of a city is more about everyday wonders." The article listed street clocks in Prague; New York City's High Line; a fire station in Gelsenkirchen, Germany; London's Regent's Park; the Simone de Beauvoir footbridge in Paris; Tokyo Midtown, a 6 million sq. ft mixed-use district in Roppongi; and nineteen other "everyday wonders." These projects represent the wide span of urban design, a subfield of urban planning, landscape architecture, and architecture.

Though urban design was not given an official name/identity until the late 1950s, it has roots in the civic design of the turn of the twentieth century. Three early books framed the field: Camillo Sitte's 1889 *City Planning According to Artistic Principles*, translated by George and Christine Crasemann Collins (London: Phaidon Press, 1965); Charles Mulford Robinson's *The Improvement of Cities and Towns, or, The Practical Basis of Civic Aesthetics* (New York: Putman's, 1903); and Werner Hegemann and Elbert Peet's *The American Vitruvius: An Architect's Handbook on Civic Art* (New York: Architectural Book Publishing, 1922). The authors of these books analyzed public space, building composition, and public art. They recommended replication of historic designs – the medieval market square or the Baroque public space – and adornment of streets, parks, and squares with classical decorative art. (See "Modernism and Early Urban Planning" in this *Reader*.)

Modernism, emerging in the early twentieth century, squashed these traditional city-building ideas. Led by architect Le Corbusier, modernists designed buildings to look as if they were mass-produced – Le Corbusier's own Domino house (1914), a simple unadorned, rectilinear, concrete structure, is a prime example. For Corbusier, it was a short step from designing houses to designing cities. The bold superblocks, wide streets, and high-rise offices and residences of his *Cité contemporaine* (1922), *Plan voisin* (1922), and *Cité radieuse* electrified colleagues and critics alike. In 1928, Corbu and his followers formed the Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) to promote their designs. They created the CIAM grid, a giant matrix that specified the per-capita square footage for housing, work, recreation, and many other functions. Guided by the grid, designers went to work finding clients among the many public authorities engaged in large-scale urban redevelopment projects after World War II – either rebuilding war-torn areas in Europe (London's Barbican, for example) or practicing urban renewal in the United States (Boston's West End).

By the 1950s a backlash against CIAM-inspired urban design set in. When Jose Luis Sert, Dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Design, convened a two-day symposium on urban design in April 1956 the more than 200 designers, journalists, and elected officials in attendance applauded journalist Jane Jacobs as she castigated city planners for their promotion of vast barren urban renewal projects. Two years later, the University of Pennsylvania and the Rockefeller Foundation sponsored a followup conference, at which attendees reiterated their critiques but spoke of the need to find a new direction for the field. To this end, Rockefeller started a

grant program in urban design. Kevin Lynch received funding for an observational project, which looked at how people found their way in cities, resulting in *Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960). Other grants were awarded to Jane Jacobs, for *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961); Christopher Tunnard and Boris Pushkarev, for *Man-made America: Chaos or Control?* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1963); and Erwin Gutkind, for the eight-volume *International History of City Development* (New York: Free Press, 1964–1972).

Those 1960s authors articulated what have become the key principles for today's urban designers. (See "Dimensions of Performance" and "Downtown is for People" in this *Reader*.) They are: (1) enhancing the vitality and legibility of the public realm; (2) increasing the pleasure and comfort of city residents and visitors; (3) using public investments to stimulate private investment in property development; (4) blending the natural and built environment in sustainable ways; and (5) giving meaning to places, whether it be historic, cultural or aesthetic. Urban designers pursue these goals through work in every geographic scale from the vest-pocket park (see William H. Whyte's *Social Life of Small Urban Places*) to the region (Peter Calthorpe and John Fregonese's *Envision Utah* plan).

The Rockefeller-funded writers inspired a number of followers who codified the principles. In 1987, for example, California planners Alan Jacobs and Donald Appleyard issued a manifesto articulating four requirements for good urban design. It provides minimum density, integration of activities, pedestrian-oriented public spaces, and diverse building types ("Toward an Urban Design Manifesto," *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 53: 1, 1987). Four years later, architects Peter Calthorpe, Andrés Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and a handful of others translated these ideas into "New Urbanism," a call for compact, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly places (Ahwahnee Principles; see www.lgc.org/ahwahnee/principles.html). They later asserted that this formula was best expressed with traditional designs – gridded streets with wide, tree-lined sidewalks, two-story houses with front porches, corner stores, downtowns with housing mixed with retail.

The Duany group founded the Congress for New Urbanism (CNU) to promote New Urbanism through publications (books, newsletters, scholarly articles), executed projects (it claims 210 completed by 2008), conferences, and an informative website (www.cnu.org/). Articles in popular magazines like *Newsweek*, real estate advertisements, and even a movie setting (*The Truman Show*, 1998) have popularized the movement. New Urbanists, in hopes of further institutionalizing their models, are encouraging municipalities to replace traditional zoning ordinances with "form-based" codes that mandate not a certain type of land use or a certain density but rather a prescribed building type, on the grounds that the *look* of a community's built forms is key. (See Plate 1.14 and "Shaping Cities through Development Regulations" in this *Reader*).

But new urbanism is by no means the only paradigm for urban design. There are many others scattered throughout the world, but they are somewhat less formulaic and defy easy categorization. In 2005 New York's Museum of Modern Art, in an exhibit entitled "Groundswell," showcased more than twenty urban design projects from a wide range of countries – German parks, British town centers, Japanese riverfronts, even the adaptive reuse of a sanitary landfill in the United States. Although uniquely tailored to their sites, the projects all have common characteristics, including their urban locations, dramatic transformation of the public realm, and unusual visual experiences.

This selection is a New Urbanist piece from a book criticizing contemporary suburbanization, written by the movement's entrepreneurial founders, Andrés Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and one of their chief lieutenants, Jeff Speck. Duany and Plater-Zyberk, who are married, helped start the edgy Miami-based firm Arquitectonica in 1977. Three years later the couple launched their own firm, DPZ. Also based in Miami, it produces neotraditionalist projects. Their most recent book, written with Robert Alminana, is *New Civic Art: Elements of Town Planning* (New York: Rizzoli, 2003). Since 1996 Plater-Zyberk has served as Dean of the University of Miami School of Architecture. The third author, Jeff Speck, was DPZ's director of town planning before serving as Director of Design at the National Endowment for the Arts. He is now in private practice with Canopy Development, Northampton, Massachusetts.

For more reading on the evolution of urban design, see Sigfried Gideon, *Time, Space and Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1941); Gordon Cullen, *The Concise Townscape* (London: Elsevier, 1961); Paul D. Spreiregen, *Urban Design: The Architecture of Cities and Towns* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965); Edmund Bacon, *Design of Cities* (New York: Viking Press, 1967); Collin Rowe, *Collage City*

(Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978); Jonathan Barnett, *Introduction to Urban Design* (New York: HarperCollins, 1982); Francis Tibbalds, *Making People-friendly Towns: Improving the Public Environment in Towns and Cities* (London: Longman, 1992); Jonathan Barnett, *Redesigning Cities: Principles, Practice, Implementation* (Chicago: APA Planners Press, 2003); and Jon Lang, *Urban Design: A Typology of Procedures and Products* (London: Elsevier, 2004).

To sample urban design writings, see Matthew Carmona and Steven Tiesdell (eds), *Urban Design Reader* (Oxford: Elsevier, 2007), and Michael Larice and Elizabeth Macdonald (eds), *The Urban Design Reader* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007). The American Planning Association's *Planning and Urban Design Standards* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2006) is an excellent reference book offering measurements and minimum standards for streets, parking spaces, tree planting, and other elements of urban design.

Christopher B. Leinberger's *The Option of Urbanism: Investing in a New American Dream* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2008), the most recent of the many offerings on New Urbanism, shows how to blend finance and design to achieve walkable places. Witold Rybczynski's *Last Harvest: From Cornfield to New Town* (New York: Scribner, 2007) traces a developer and his quest to convince a rural town to permit a New Urbanist subdivision. Other books focusing on New Urbanist practice are: Hank Dittmar and Gloria Ohland (eds), *The New Transit Town: Best Practices in Transit-oriented Development* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2004); Douglas Kelbaugh, *Repairing the American Metropolis: Common Place Revisited* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2002); and Peter Calthorpe and William B. Fulton, *The Regional City: Planning for the End of Sprawl* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2001).

Three different offerings treat areas of broad concern for urban designers: Richard B. Peiser with Adrienne Schmitz (ed.), *Regenerating Older Suburbs* (Washington, DC: Urban Land Institute, 2007), Julie Campoli and Alex S. MacLean, *Visualizing Density* (Cambridge, MA: Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2007), and Mike Jenks and Nicola Dempsey, *Future Forms and Design for Sustainable Cities*, Oxford: Elsevier, 2006).

Much information about urban design can be found on a group of superb websites. The site of Project for Public Spaces (www.pps.org/) has a section on great cities. The Resource for Urban Design Information is a British site (www.rudi.net). Some cities have active design advocacy groups with websites – see the Municipal Art Society of New York (www.mas.org), San Francisco's Planning + Urban Research Association (www.spur.org) and Philadelphia's www.planphilly.com.



As badly as we have been shaping our built environment, we still possess the ability to do it right. The principles and techniques of true urban design may have been forgotten, but they are not lost; they can be relearned from the many wonderful older places that still exist. By emulating the past, a number of recent projects have demonstrated that designers can make new places that are as impressive as the towns which inspired them.

REASONS NOT TO, AND REASONS TO DO SO ANYWAY

[...]

New Towns are not always the answer. The appropriateness of a greenfield development depends on

the particular characteristics of the surrounding region. Certain facts must be accepted as given. If a region is not growing statistically – in population or wealth – it should not be growing geographically. The result of such unwarranted dispersal is the draining of the inner city and the wasteful distribution of new infrastructure. Even in regions that are growing, the objectives of economic efficiency and social justice suggest that growth be focused in areas that are already at least partially developed.

Why create new places at all when existing places are underutilized? It must be clearly stated that many social and environmental ills would best be solved, at least temporarily, by a moratorium on greenfield development. There is a ready supply of vacant land available for infill projects, both in the inner city and in existing suburbs. But

...forces conspire to make exurban investment more attractive to developers than infill work. For the time being, as we fight these incentives for suburban growth, we must admit that it is still occurring, and in the worst possible form: automobile-based sprawl.

... Unless unjustified greenfield development is stopped – an unlikely prospect – designers should endeavor to ensure that what gets built on the urban fringe is environmentally sound, economically efficient, and socially just. ... [Following are design] ... principles that should inform any conscientious attempt at healthy suburban growth. ...

REGIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

The most important design criteria of any new village or town – and the least often satisfied – are regional. Currently, most development occurs not according to geographical logic but according to the random disposition of resources: the first parcels to be developed are often those whose owners have the financing, rather than the ones that are the best located or the least environmentally sensitive. ... Ideally, parcels under consideration for growth should be rationally located within a comprehensive regional plan that seeks to limit automobile dependence and preserve open space. If not immediately adjacent to existing development, the new development should be at a concentration of infrastructure and, if possible, at a likely transit stop. In the best regional plans, existing and future rail lines serve as a basis for locating new neighborhoods and town centers.

MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT

Regardless of location, a new neighborhood can avoid unduly contributing to sprawl by being of mixed use. At the bare minimum, every residential neighborhood must include a corner store to provide its residents with their daily needs, from milk to aspirin. While it is only a start, a small corner store does wonders to limit automobile trips out of the development, and does more than a social club to build the bonds of community.

The corner store should be constructed in an early building phase. It will not, at first, be eco-

nomically self-sufficient, due to the small number of houses around it. It should not be expected to turn a profit until the neighborhood matures, and for that reason the retail space should be provided rent-free by the developer as an amenity, much in the way a conventional developer would construct an elaborate entry feature or a clubhouse. Since it can be very effective in marketing real estate – if properly staffed with a gregarious busybody – the corner store is a fairly easy concept for enlightened developers to understand.

[...]

The corner store is, of course, only the first step toward a true mix of uses. A neighborhood-scale shopping center may be appropriate for a larger population or when adjacent to through traffic. Such a concentration of retail – around 20,000 sq. ft, including groceries, dry cleaner, video rental, and other daily needs – should be designed as part of any large development in anticipation of future demand. Any town plan with two neighborhoods or more should include such a town center, which is built when there are enough citizens to make it viable.

A mixed-use neighborhood also includes places to work, the more the better. Perhaps the smallest, aside from the home office, is the neighborhood work center, a place where residents can share the costs of a secretary, office equipment, and meeting rooms. Such neighborhood work centers are emerging in a for-profit form as the local Kinko's, a business that is flourishing as more people choose to work at home.

Ideally, every neighborhood should be designed with an even balance of residents and jobs. While this flies in the face of convention, it is not impossible, to implement. All that is needed is for the housing and commercial developers to agree to work in the same location with a coordinated plan. When there is only one developer for both, it is even easier. Riverside is a new Atlanta neighborhood recently built by Post Properties, a company large enough to develop housing and office space at the same time. Their first phase of construction included a quarter-million square feet of office space and two hundred apartments, all of which were rented immediately at rates 40 per cent above the market average. ...

A common criticism of “forcing” the workplace into residential areas is that, even though the

workplace is near the homes, it is not near the homes of the people who work there. This assertion may be true at first, but not over the long run. There is no doubt that most of the workplace in new towns will be staffed initially by people who commute from some distance away, just as most of the new houses will be occupied by people with steady jobs elsewhere. But the study of older communities shows that this relationship improves within a generation. When they can, people will relocate their home or business to be near their business or home. It is the planner's imperative to offer them the opportunity to do so.

Criticism of traditional town planning can be shortsighted, as it presumes that fully integrated communities can be conjured up overnight. True towns take time; a designer can only provide the ingredients and conditions most likely to lead to a mixed-use future. Eighteen years after it was planned, Seaside just built its first school, but has yet to build its town hall. . . .

Which brings up the final component of mixed use: civic buildings. After housing, shops, and workplaces, civic buildings are a required element for any new community. Indeed, land should be reserved for them at the most prominent locations, such as a high ground, a main intersection, or the town square. Larger civic buildings – city halls, libraries, churches, and the like – require the most patience, as they are typically the last to get built, but they must be planned for if they are to exist at all. In the meantime, smaller civic buildings such as the neighborhood recreation center or the bandstand on the town green square can serve as social centers and contribute to a sense of community identity.

The most important civic building is the neighborhood elementary school, which should never be more than a fifteen-minute walk from any home. This may seem a radical proposition these days, when schools seem to be sized primarily for the efficiency of the janitorial service, but there are many arguments in its favor. It has become clear that small schools are key to effective learning. Recent studies have demonstrated that schools with fewer than 400 students have better attendance rates, fewer problem children and dropouts, and often higher test scores. . . .

True neighborhoods mix different uses within individual buildings as well. Many mixed-use

buildings containing apartments, offices, and shops have been constructed in new traditional towns such as Seaside. . . .

CONNECTIVITY

If a new neighborhood is to contribute more to its region than traffic, it must do more than just mix uses. Its relationship to its neighbors is important as well. In order to avoid the inefficient hierarchical street pattern of sprawl, in which virtually every trip uses the same few collector roads, the new neighborhood must connect wherever practical to everything around it, even if its neighbors are nothing but single-use pods. One must say "wherever practical," because it is obviously not possible to connect across superhighways or river beds, nor is it advisable to connect to oil refineries or trucking depots. But all compatible land uses should be connected, especially between residential areas, the most common adjacency.

This is easier said than done. Whenever we design a new neighborhood, we make every effort to convince the adjacent subdivisions to allow us to connect to them. We'll go so far as to place the most luxurious housing directly abutting the neighbors, whatever the quality of their housing. We hand them photographs and testimonials from our other developments, and appraisals demonstrating their impressive financial performance.

[. . .]

Connectivity is also an important issue as it concerns highways and arterials. . . . [T]he concept of the highwayless town implies two basic rules: highways and arterials approaching neighborhoods should skirt them rather than split them; and when they do come into contact with a neighborhood, they should take on low-speed geometries. Unfortunately, this contradicts current conventions. We battle over these rules in almost every development we work on, thanks to public works directors who prioritize traffic volume over neighborhood viability. . . .

When faced with a major road, how should a neighborhood respond? That depends on whether the road is designed as a civic thoroughfare or as an automotive sewer. When it is properly detailed as an avenue or a main street – as is appropriate within the neighborhood – or as a parkway or

boulevard at the neighborhood edge, the thoroughfare becomes a worthy setting for buildings and will benefit aesthetically from their presence. Princeton, New Jersey, has just such a main street – a delightful collection of shops fronting a major regional arterial – and in Kansas City’s Country Club District expensive estates directly face a heavily trafficked roadway. Seen to best advantage across deep lawns, these houses provide motorists with a grand entry into the city.

Only when noxious, high-speed traffic is inevitable should a road face the backs of houses. If a developer resorts to this solution, he must build a wall as well, or the backyards become uninhabitable. Since most major roads are designed to create high-speed traffic, the “sound wall” is the standard solution in the new suburbs.

The ruling principle is that as long as the road is designed with low-speed geometries, traffic generally treats the neighborhood the way that the neighborhood treats it. Friendly house fronts tell drivers to slow down, while blank walls and house backs tell them to speed up. An intermediate solution, appropriate for roads of moderate speed, is to face the road with the short ends of the blocks, so that it is met with the sides of houses, with a deep lawn as an additional buffer. Sunset Boulevard in Beverly Hills is configured this way. Every block ends on the boulevard, resulting in an intersection every 300 ft or less. Such frequent spacing can raise the hackles of the traffic engineers, who tend to want much wider spacing between intersections, so that cars can travel at higher speeds. These engineers must be reminded of the difference between a boulevard and a highway, and that the latter has no place in residential areas.

MAKING THE MOST OF A SITE

Modern development is notorious for its unique approach to nature, typically: *level the site first, design it later*. This attitude has been the rule rather than the exception since the 1800s, when Jefferson laid his perfect grid across the continent. It comes as no surprise, then, that the typical American builder would rather spend \$100,000 on bulldozers and artificial drainage than on a sensitive site plan.

We know better now, and there are many justifications for preserving a site’s natural qualities,

aside from the obvious ecological benefits. First, natural features – not just waterfront and hillsides, but wetlands and trees – can add significantly to property value. Second, the character of the landscape can help people understand and negotiate their environment. It is much easier to give directions, even in cul-de-sac suburbia, if one can say “take a left at the pond.” Finally, for planners, varied and idiosyncratic sites are actually easier to design, and much more interesting. While flat and featureless land gives few hints as to where to begin, a complex site tells the designer pretty clearly what it wants to be. . . .

[. . .]

THE DISCIPLINE OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD

. . . The five-minute walk – or *pedestrian shed* – is roughly one-quarter mile in distance. It was conceptualized as a determinant of neighborhood size in the classic 1929 New York City Regional Plan, but it has existed as an informal standard since the earliest cities, from Pompeii to Greenwich Village. If one were to map the neighborhoods of most pre-war cities, they would average about one-quarter mile from edge to center. While some flexibility is advisable – the West Coast designer Peter Calthorpe recommends a ten-minute walk in order to engage a larger number of households to a transit stop, and college students seem to put up with twenty minutes, . . . most new traditional town plans are designed around the five-minute measure. One-quarter mile is usually the distance from which you can actually spot your destination. More important, experience suggests that it is a distance short enough that most Americans simply feel dumb driving, making it a perfect rule of thumb for our auto-dependent times.

The first step in designing an open site is to use its natural features to locate the centers and edges of five-minute-walk neighborhoods. Neighborhood centers are typically located at the geographic center of the available land, but can be shifted in response to site conditions, such as a view or a major road at one edge. . . . For sites large enough to hold multiple neighborhoods, two organizational options are available: the neighborhoods can be distinct, separated by a green belt, in which case

each remains a village, or the neighborhoods can be directly adjacent, sharing a boulevard at their seam, in which case they can coalesce into a town or even a city. In both cases, the overall structure links neighborhood centers with avenues in a fairly direct transit loop. . . .

[. . .]

Once the center and the edge of a neighborhood have been located, the distribution of uses follows naturally. The areas of highest density and urbanity surround the center, which is the location of a major public space such as a plaza, square, or green, depending on the local tradition. The center is also the location for shops and a transit stop. From the center outward, housing densities fall, such that, in villages, the conditions at the edge can be downright rural. Different building types are “zoned,” not by use, but by size, and changes in zoning occur at mid block rather than mid street, so that each street tends to have the same building types on both of its sides. This is quite different from the asymmetrical experience typically encountered in suburbia.

As one leaves the center and approaches the neighborhood edge, building densities decrease and there occurs a corresponding shift in the design of the street. Every single aspect of the public realm transforms from urban to rural. Closed curbs and gutters become open swales; trees stop lining up and become more varied in species; sidewalks narrow and eventually disappear; and front yards become gradually deeper. In this way, there is an authentic and gentle transition from culture to nature. This sort of detailing, which is essential to giving a neighborhood a unique sense of place, requires designers and developers to exercise a degree of care that is now rare. One can only hope that the financial success of the new places designed in this manner will eventually encourage more developers to invest in such precise design.

The gradual transition from center to edge occurs most clearly in villages, which by definition are single neighborhoods sitting free in the landscape. In towns or cities, where multiple neighborhoods meet across shared main streets, the neighborhood edges may instead be designed as areas of increased density and activity. In this case, the urban/rural transition is reserved for the outer edge of the entire collection of neighborhoods.

In addition to this radial organization, the neighborhood also possesses a Cartesian substructure. . . . The larger streets that lead to the center divide the neighborhood into quadrants, each of which is sized to be the independent realm of the small child. As such, each is equipped with nothing but the slowest roads, and contains a local “pocket park” – often no bigger than a single house lot – located within a three-minute walk of every dwelling. The neighborhood thus grants freedom of motion and a certain degree of autonomy even to its youngest citizens.

MAKING TRANSIT WORK

The neighborhood structure is naturally suited for public transit, be it light rail, trolleys, buses, or jitneys. But there are also three rules that transit must follow in order to appeal to users, regardless of the urban framework:

- 1 *Transit must be frequent and predictable.* The challenge is not to prove this obvious principle but to create a transit system in which frequency is economically viable. This objective can be achieved only at certain densities; studies suggest that a minimum of seven units per acre is necessary if transit is to be self-supporting. For lower densities, the careful organization of neighborhood centers, to be served by smaller vehicles, can result in a successful network. This network, however, would likely require financial support.
- 2 *Transit must follow a route that is direct and logical.* Riders shy away from transit systems in which the path is not efficient and easy to understand conceptually. Anyone who has ever taken a shared hotel bus to the airport knows how intolerable an uncertain, zigzagging route can be. Yet bus routes often dogleg interminably. The desire for a trustworthy, unchanging route is one factor that helps explain riders' preference for light rail over buses.
- 3 *The transit stop must be safe, dry, and dignified.* In most suburban communities, transit passengers are made to feel like impoverished transients, waiting by the side of the road on a graffiti-covered bench or inside an ungainly plastic bubble. No wonder, then, that the only people who take the bus are those who have no choice,

creating a self-perpetuating underclass ridership. In contrast, the structure of the traditional neighborhood offers the possibility of a transit experience that is both comfortable and civilized. When the transit stop is located at the neighborhood center, next to the corner store or the café, the commuter has the opportunity to wait for the bus or trolley indoors with a cup of coffee and a newspaper, with some measure of comfort and dignity. For this condition to occur with regularity, transit routes and urban plans must be developed in concert. Ideally, transit authorities should also work directly with shop owners, who typically welcome the extra business that a transit stop can generate.

THE STREETS

... On well traveled streets within a neighborhood, there is no justification for travel lanes wider than 10 ft and parking lanes wider than 7 ft. If either are any wider, the cars speed. However, on less traveled residential streets, another logic should prevail, that of the "yield street." Common in almost every prewar American neighborhood – but now summarily rejected by public works departments – the yield street uses a single travel lane to handle traffic *in both directions*. When two cars approach each other, they both slow down, and one eases slightly into a parking lane while the other passes. Because traffic is necessarily slow, accidents are virtually unheard of on such streets. While inappropriate for heavy volume, yield streets cause few delays when used for minor residential streets in low-density neighborhoods.

Although this type of street is endorsed in the engineers' official manual, it is virtually impossible to get one approved. Almost everywhere we've worked, our demand for yield streets has threatened to delay our projects. It seems irrelevant that these streets exist in every older city, and that we have all driven on them regularly without incident.

[. . .]

THE BUILDINGS

A good town plan is not enough to generate a desirable public realm; individual private buildings

must also behave in a manner that contributes to pedestrian life. Once again, a study of how the most valued historic neighborhoods differ from conventional sprawl uncovers the rules for a pedestrian-friendly architecture.

While conditions should vary throughout the neighborhood, houses should generally be placed close to the street in order to define its space, with fronts that are relatively simple and flat. Setbacks should range from about 10 ft near the neighborhood center to about 30 ft near the neighborhood edge. To encourage sociability, the front yard should include porches, balconies, stoops, bay windows, or other semi-private attachments. These attachments should be allowed to encroach within the setback area, so that they represent a gain in space rather than a loss for those who build them. With the proper incentives, front porches need not be mandated, although the town planner who wishes to create streets and squares of dependable character may do so in specific areas.

Attached row houses, a common urban type, should generally be placed closer to the sidewalk than freestanding houses – right up against it, with room only for the stoop. In this case, the first floor must be raised at least 2 ft off the ground for privacy. People don't seem to mind sipping tea directly adjacent to passing pedestrians if those pedestrians can't easily see over the window sill. Residential spaces within 5 ft of a sidewalk must never be located at ground level, period. If one must place a ground-level room within 10 ft of a sidewalk, it must be protected by a porch or a dense garden.

For retail buildings, the setback rule is straightforward: don't have one. Traditional retail, to be successful, must pull directly up to the sidewalk, so that people can see the merchandise in the window. Parking lots in front are of course forbidden: there is little that is more destructive to pedestrian life. All parking that cannot be handled on the street can be provided by mid-block lots that are hidden behind buildings. The connection from mid-block parking to street-shop entrances is a tricky one, and must be handled with extreme care. The most effective technique is the traditional *pedestrian passage* . . . in which a carefully detailed walkway – often articulated with trellises, fountains, stairways to second-floor apartments, and landscaping – connects the rear parking lot to the street. Experienced

retailers recognize this passage as a merchandizing opportunity, and flank it with windows and indoor/outdoor displays. In Palm Beach, a series of charming “paseos” helps to make Worth Avenue one of America’s most successful shopping destinations.

Whether commercial or residential, taller buildings are to be encouraged because they use land more efficiently while doing a better job defining the public space. Most houses should be a minimum of two stories tall. One-story shops and offices, the suburban standard, fail to provide for mixed use and are a waste of valuable land. They should be combined with each other or with housing whenever possible. Where no other mechanism exists to make this happen, municipalities should direct their housing subsidies to the construction of apartments above shops.

There is one last rule that much of suburbia needs to follow: traditional architectural detailing, if used at all, should be used accurately, or it results in parody. There is no specific argument or justification for this rule, except for the horrible feeling that one gets when it is broken. . . .

PARKING

When building new places, one quickly finds that the amount of dwellings, shops, and offices that one can provide depends primarily on the amount of parking that can be accommodated. As one of our clients puts it, “parking is destiny.” Unfortunately, parking is often a very antiurban destiny, as most municipalities’ parking requirements make higher densities impossible without multilevel parking garages, something that most developers can’t afford to build. The high cost of structured parking – \$12,000 per place, versus \$1,500 in a surface lot – is the reason why almost every new suburban building is either less than three stories tall or more than ten stories tall; only a tower can pay for a parking garage.

When new towns are being built in the suburbs, parking requirements cannot be dismissed, as they can be in an older city. Most developers and their lenders insist on ample parking, anyway. The key to sizing parking lots properly in the suburbs is to recognize that the existing requirements are written for the purest sprawl, in which no alternatives to driving exist, and on-street parking is rarely

allowed. Each of the factors that distinguishes traditional towns from sprawl – on-street parking, mixed use, transit (when present), pedestrian viability, etc. – also reduces the number of parking spaces that are needed. For example, mixed use means that a school and a cinema can share a parking lot, since they have complementary schedules; the same is true of an office building and an apartment house. Therefore, it is improper to apply the standard suburban parking requirements – often as high as five off-street parking spaces for every 1,000 sq. ft of construction – to a mixed-use neighborhood. A more appropriate requirement is three per 1,000 sq. ft, *including on-street spaces*. This is the number that acknowledges the opportunity for shared parking.

That’s still a lot of parking, enough to undermine most attempts at urbanity. But it is important to remember that *where* is more significant than *how much*, and that the quality of the street space comes first. An essential rule of thumb is to provide no more offstreet parking than can be concealed behind buildings, and no more buildings than that amount of parking can support.

THE INEVITABLE QUESTION OF STYLE

Traditional neighborhood design has little or nothing to do with the issue of architectural style. This point may seem obvious to lay readers, but the question of style must be addressed for one reason: it is the architectural style of most Traditional Neighborhood Developments that causes them to be dismissed as “nostalgic” by much of the design profession. While the word style is hardly used in architectural circles – “What style is your architecture?” is a question that makes most designers cringe – the fact is that the current architectural establishment could be accurately described as violently allergic to traditional-style architecture. For many architects, it is impossible to see past the pitched roofs and wooden shutters of Seaside and Kentlands to the progressive town-planning concepts underneath.

Why the negative reaction? Because modernist architects associate it with ideology, style takes on moral overtones. In an age of technology and diversity they believe that it is morally unacceptable to build with techniques of an earlier era or in styles used by repressive societies. Now, there is

no denying that the avant-garde has contributed tremendously to the vitality of our culture, from urban skyscrapers to war memorials. It has fared less well, however, in the common vernacular – the suburban building for everyday uses – where, at odds with the human need for communication and personalization, it has been thoroughly debased. . . .

As a result, there now exist essentially three different types of architecture: cutting-edge modernist, authentic traditional, and a gigantic middle ground of compromise that includes lazy historicism, halfhearted modernism, and everything in between, most of which could be called kitsch. While cutting-edge modernism has proved popular for monuments, commercial structures, some apartment buildings, and the spectacular houses of well-to-do patrons, it has not penetrated the

middle-class housing market. The vast majority of home buyers are only interested in traditional architecture or, sadly, the middle ground of compromise.

It is on this ravaged battlefield that the campaign for traditional town planning is being waged. Most of our audience – the citizens and public servants who must approve our projects if they are to be built – do not appreciate or trust modernist architecture. To present the ideas of neighborhood design in an underappreciated modernist vocabulary would bring them up against insuperable skepticism, even more than they already face for being different. It is hard enough convincing suburbanites to accept mixed uses, varied-income housing, and public transit without throwing flat roofs and corrugated metal siding into the equation.

[. . .]