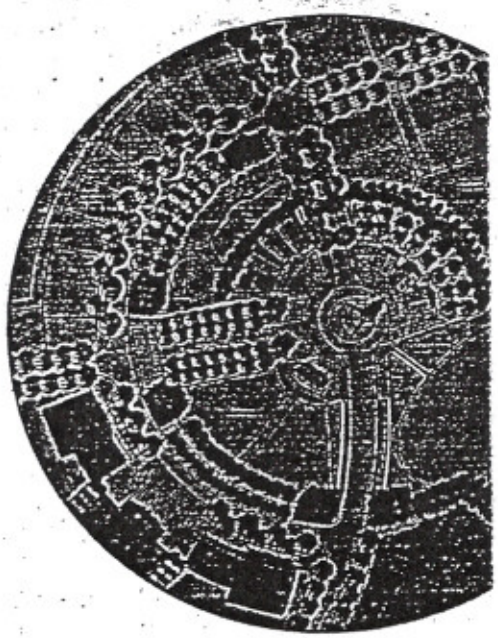
THE NEW URBANISM



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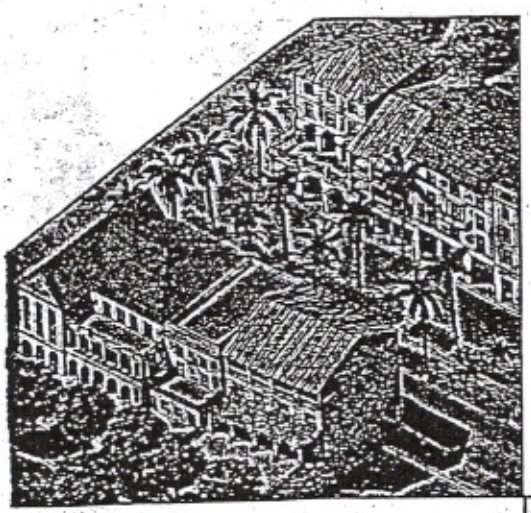

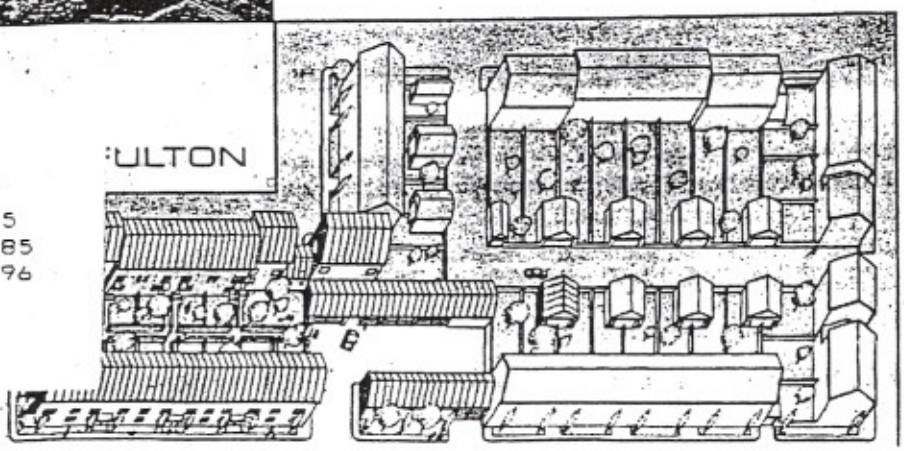

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The New Urbanism: Hope or Hype for American Communities?

This report is one in a series of policy focus reports published by the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy to address timely land-related questions of concern to policymakers, scholars and citizens. Each report is based on a workshop or confere designed to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Participants typically represent a range of academic disciplines professional experience and types of communities.

In December 1995, the Lincoln Institute sponsored a seminar to explore "The Influences of New Urbanism: Design, Development and Behavior," on which this report is based in part. Participants in that two-day session included:

Randall Arendt, Vice President, Natural Lands Trust, Media, Pennsylvania

Ivonne Audirac, Assistant Professor of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida

Tridib Banerjee, Professor of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California

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Randall Crane, Assistant Professor of Urban and Regional Planning, University of California, Irvine, California

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Executive Summary

The New Urbanism has captured the imagination of the American public like no urban planning movement in decades. Amid great fanfare, New Urbanists are seeking to redefine the nature of the American metropolis by reintroducing traditional notions of neighborhood design and fitting those ideas into a variety of urban and suburban settings.

The New Urbanism began as a reaction to conventional suburban planning as it has been practiced in the United States since the 1940s. New Urbanists view the decentralized, auto-oriented suburb as a recipe for disaster. They blame these suburbs for ever-increasing congestion on arterial roads, a lack of meaningful civic life, the loss of open space, limited opportunities for children and others without cars, and a general discontent among suburbanites. In their view, older, traditional neighborhoods, both urban and suburban, are more adaptable and permit a more satisfying life.

As the latest in a long line of reform movements that have sought to establish new planning and design principles that may be applied to metropolitan areas and, especially, to new suburban neighborhoods, the New Urbanism owes much to the City Beautiful and Garden City movements of the early twentieth century. The "neotraditional" view of urban planning that began in the early 1980s with the widely publicized new town of Seaside, Florida, has since matured into the New Urbanism movement of the 1990s.

Many different sets of planning and design principles are circulating around the New Urbanism banner, but most definitions include the ideas of walkable neighborhoods oriented around the five-minute walk, public transit systems, and greater integration of different types of land uses at the neighborhood level.

In addition, most New Urbanists claim to be committed to the concepts of strong citizen participation, affordable housing, and social and economic diversity, though these ideas do not fit so neatly onto a list of neighborhood design characteristics. In its rhetoric, the New Urbanism strives for a kind of utopian social ideal, although most New Urbanists focus on a community's physical infrastructure in the belief that community design can create or influence particular social patterns.

Promises and Challenges

The New Urbanism is still in its infancy, and there remains a great deal of skepticism about what its proponents seek to achieve. Although millions of Americans live in "old urban" neighborhoods, fewer than 2,000 live in new neighborhoods built strictly according to New Urbanist principles. Many critics believe that, while the New Urbanism contains many attractive ideas, it may have difficulty dealing with a wide range of contemporary issues that generally fall into five broad categories: scale, transportation, planning and codes, regionalism, and marketing.

Scale:	Can a set of design principles that seeks to recreate traditional small-town neighborhoods accommodate or compete with the massive "big-box" retailers and workplaces that now dominate the American economy?
Transportation:	Can the New Urbanism actually relieve traffic congestion, offer realistic transportation alternatives for residents and change their travel behavior, as its advocates claim?
Planning and Codes:	Can the New Urbanism be integrated into local plans and building codes, which tend to represent a very different and less flexible tradition of community planning and development?
Regionalism:	Can the New Urbanism move successfully beyond planning on a neighborhood scale to create a compelling vision of metropolitan growth?
Marketing:	Can the New Urbanism find success in a marketplace that seems so skeptical of many of its ideals?

Although it is often advertised as a panacea, the New Urbanism is only one alternative to suburban sprawl. It will probably function most successfully in a regional planning context that may include significant investments in transit, incentives to reinvest in the inner city, and disincentives to build at the metropolitan fringe.

At the same time, it is important to appreciate the power of the New Urbanism as an idea. Perhaps the most refreshing aspect of this movement is the simple fact that it promotes a positive image of "town life" that includes the public as well as the private realm. In a world where a "lack of community" is often blamed for many social ills, this is no small achievement.

Introduction

In May of 1995, the suburbs suddenly made an unexpected appearance on the cover of *Newsweek* magazine. In almost tongue-in-cheek fashion, the cover photo showed a stereotypical 1950s suburban family, with the wife and children running across the front lawn to greet the father arriving home from work in his car. But the *Newsweek* cover wasn't a celebration of the suburbs. It was, instead, an indictment.[1]

Splashed across the top of the cover—above the idyllic photo—was the headline: "Bye-Bye, Suburban Dream." At the bottom was a smaller headline advertising: "15 Ways to Fix the Suburbs." Inside, *Newsweek* devoted four pages to railing about suburban sprawl and seven more laying out those 15 suburb-repairing ideas in easy, bite-size pieces like "Bring Back the Corner Store," "Make the Streets Skinny," and "Hide the Garage."

In promoting the argument that the suburbs are not working any more, *Newsweek* was adopting the buzzwords of a fast-growing reform movement in American urban planning that has come to be known as "The New Urbanism."

Since the early 1980s, a growing group of planners, architects, and developers has been rebelling against "conventional" suburban development as it has been practiced in the United States since the end of World War II. Instead, they have offered up an alternative vision of suburban neighborhoods—and, indeed, an alternative vision of metropolitan areas as a whole. Once mostly theoretical, the movement is now yielding tangible results, as developers and cities around the country are planning and building neighborhoods based on New Urbanist principles.

At the core of the New Urbanism lies a set of so-called "neotraditional planning" principles meant to restore both the physical design and social values of American neighborhoods, with an emphasis on walking and community life. These are the kinds of design principles that *Newsweek* highlighted in its 15 tips: making neighborhood streets narrower so they invite social interaction; using alleys as a means of getting garages and garbage cans out of public view; and making better pedestrian connections between residential neighborhoods and commercial areas.

Building on these neighborhood design principles, the New Urbanism is also attempting—against difficult odds—to lay out a broader vision of how to handle American metropolitan growth in general. Many New Urbanists have embraced inner-city reinvestment, "infill" development, the retooling of older suburban developments and shopping malls, and—to some extent—urban growth boundaries. These attempts to create a "New Regionalism" to correspond to the New Urbanism have not been completely worked out yet, nor have they captured the public imagination in the same way that front porches and picket fences have become symbols of new and improved neighborhood design.

GLOSSARY

Compact Developmer
New real estate development that consumes less land than conventional suburban development.

Conventional Suburb:
Low-density, auto-oriented suburbs that have characterized the American landscape since the end of World War II.

Neotraditional Planning:
Principles of neighborhood design that are pedestrian-oriented and offer a mix of land uses including public spaces; a precursor to the New Urbanism.

New Urbanism:
A movement in architecture, planning and urban design that emphasizes a particular set of design principles, including pedestrian- and transit-oriented neighborhood design and a mix of land uses, as a means of creating more cohesive communities.

Park Once:
A strategy that acknowledges people will drive in their cars to destinations, but seeks to permit them to walk and use public transit once they are at their destination.

Pedestrian Pocket:
A simple cluster of housing, retail space and offices within a quarter-mile walking radius of a transit system.

Planned Unit Development (PUD):
Housing projects built during the 1960s to 1980s with clustered townhouses and apartments surrounded by open space and other non-residential uses.

New Urbanists are far from cohesive as a group, given their many different perspectives and backgrounds. Some identify themselves with the "urban ecologists"; others derive their ideas from European formalism. Some are wedded to neoclassical architecture and intensely urban spaces; others are more oriented toward greenways and architectural freedom.

Nevertheless, New Urbanists generally seek to redefine American communities through a specific set of physical design and "placemaking" standards that recall traditional small towns and neighborhoods. Their movement strives to achieve two broad-ranging goals:

- to create a greater sense of community by accommodating more diversity of land uses and social interaction in neighborhoods and by rethinking the "public realm," especially public spaces and the typical streetscape.
- to reorient the typical community toward a pedestrian- and transit-friendly environment, while also minimizing negative traffic and environmental effects.

The New Urbanism has not been as universally praised as *Newsweek*, and more recently *Consumer Reports*,[2] might suggest. New Urbanists are often ridiculed as mere nostalgia peddlers by an architectural establishment that has been, in historian Vincent Scully's words, "marinated in Modernism." They are frequently derided by real estate developers and free-marketeers as social engineers unwilling to accept the real preferences of the American consumer. Even within the movement, some New Urbanists fear that the focus on reinventing suburban neighborhoods won't solve broad metropolitan problems but will simply replace "suburban sprawl" with "New Urban sprawl."

The New Urbanism is still in its infancy. The best estimates suggest that fewer than 2,000 people currently live in New Urbanist neighborhoods nationwide, and New Urbanism is far from the predominant planning and design approach in most American communities.

Yet there is no question that the New Urbanism is beginning to have a deep impact on the practice of American urban planning. New Urbanist principles are being vigorously debated all over the country in planning and architecture schools, planning commission meetings and neighborhood groups. Dozens of New Urbanist projects are being proposed and developed. Even municipalities that favor conventional suburban development are now experimenting with narrower streets and clustered housing.

As the most highly publicized new movement in planning since the "New Towns" of the 1960s, the New Urbanism is likely to play an important role in directing future development and redevelopment of metropolitan areas throughout the country.

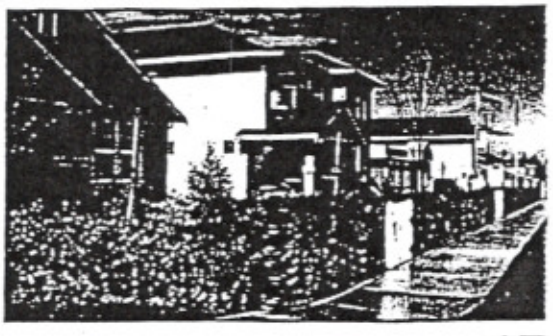
Sprawl:
A term generally used to refer to low-density, land consumptive patterns in conventional auto-oriente suburbs.

Streetcar Suburbs:
Suburbs built between 1890 and 1920 oriented around rail transit.

Traditional Neighborhoods:
Pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods built in th early twentieth century.

Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND):
A term often used by the Duany Plater-Zyberk architecture and planning firm to refer to the desig principles they employ ir implementing the New Urbanism.

Transit-oriented Development (TOD):
A term often used by Calthorpe Associates to refer to the design princip that firm employs in desi ing neighborhoods aroun regional transit systems t reduce auto traffic.



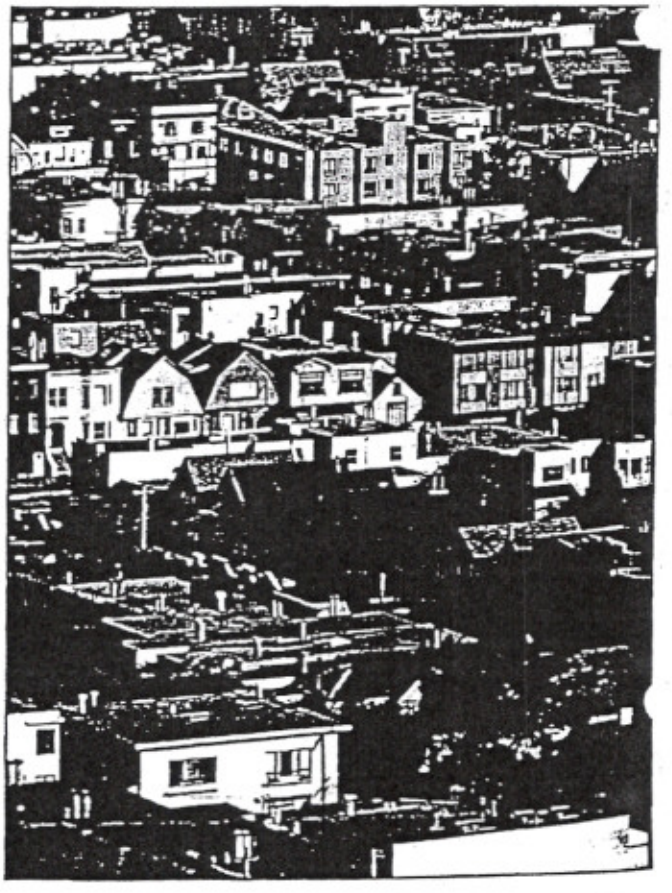
The Suburban Problem and the New Urbanist Solution

Though New Urbanists trace many of their design and planning principles back to the planning and design ideas of the "old urbanists" (see below), the New Urbanism clearly began as a reaction to conventional suburban planning as it has been practiced in the United States since the 1940s.

New Urbanists view the familiar, decentralized, auto-bound suburb as a recipe for disaster. As evidence of the failure of these suburbs, they point to ever-increasing congestion on suburban arterial roads, a lack of meaningful civic life, the loss of open space and limited opportunities for children and others without cars. They especially note the growing opposition by suburbanites to additional suburban development, even when the proposed new neighborhoods are just like the ones where they live.

This last notion can perhaps best be described as the "20 percent/70 percent" problem. A low-density suburb that is 20 percent built out is a popular place. It still has lots of open space, there is little traffic, and the conduct of daily life is easily accomplished by car. In the New Urbanist interpretation, however, a suburb that is 70 percent built out is a disaster—crowded and unsatisfying. Residents have lost the qualities of the 20-percent suburb (open space, elbow room, peacefulness) without gaining anything in return. And they see no point in letting their suburb grow to 100 percent maturity, since—in their view—things can only get worse.

According to the New Urbanists, traditional neighborhoods, both urban and suburban, offer a better alternative. In their view, older neighborhoods may be crowded and busy, but their physical forms are more adaptable and, ultimately, permit a more satisfying life. A mixture of parks, town centers and other truly public spaces ensures that neighborhoods will not be lost in a sea of interchanges, subdivisions and shopping centers. The ability to reach everyday destinations on foot or via transit relieves suburban residents of dependence on the car and opens up new possibilities to children, the elderly and the disabled. With a traditional design, New Urbanists argue, their "100-percent suburb" is a better and more satisfying place to live than a 70-percent subdivision.



With that basis, New Urbanists have identified a set of principles that they believe should form the foundation of community planning. Many different lists and sets of principles are circulating around the New Urbanism movement, but most definitions include the following ideas:

- Walkable neighborhoods oriented to the quarter-mile, five-minute walk.
- Primary orientation to public transit systems, rather than private automobiles.
- Greater integration of different land uses (such as housing, shops, workplaces and schools) at the neighborhood level.

In addition, most New Urbanists claim to be committed to the concept of strong citizen participation, affordable housing, and social and economic diversity, though these ideas do not fit so neatly onto a list of neighborhood design characteristics. In its rhetoric, the New Urbanism strives for a kind of utopian social ideal, although most New Urbanists focus on a community's physical infrastructure in the belief that community design can create or influence particular social patterns.

The first formal statement of New Urbanist ideals was developed in 1991 at a meeting convened by California's Local Government Commission at the Ahwahnee Hotel in Yosemite National Park. The document, known as The Ahwahnee Principles, was signed by several of the leading New Urbanist designers at the time, including Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, Stefanos Polyzoides, Elizabeth Moule, Peter Calthorpe and Michael Corbett.[2]

Even though the theoretical underpinnings of New Urbanism have evolved rapidly, New Urbanist communities have emerged very slowly in real life. Despite all the publicity surrounding the New Urbanism, very few people currently live in new neighborhoods built under New Urbanist principles. Millions of people, of course, live in the kinds of traditional neighborhoods the New Urbanists seek to emulate.

> The costs of suburban sprawl are all around us—they're visible in the creeping deterioration of once proud neighborhoods, the increasing alienation of large segments of society, a constantly rising crime rate and widespread environmental degradation.
>
> — Peter Katz, *The New Urbanism: Toward an Architecture of Community*

Advocates say none of the early New Urbanist communities, (e.g., Seaside, Laguna West or Kentlands, all illustrated below), are perfect—or even an adequate demonstration of the movement's ideals. But they are the places that receive attention in the media over and over again. These projects—and other developments likely to be built in the next few years—will establish the public perception of the New Urbanism and will likely lay the foundation for the movement's eventual success or failure

THE AHWAHNEE PRINCIPLES 1991

Preamble:

Existing patterns of urban and suburban development seriously impair our quality of life. The symptoms are: more congestion and air pollution resulting from our increased dependence on automobiles, the loss of precious open space, the need for costly improvements to roads and public services, the inequitable distribution of economic resources, and the loss of a sense of community. By drawing upon the best from the past and the present, we can, first, infill existing communities and, second, plan new communities that will successfully serve the needs of those who live and work within them. Such planning should adhere to these fundamental principles:

Community Principles:

1. All planning should be in the form of complete and integrated communities containing housing, shops, work places, schools, parks and civic facilities essential to the daily life of the residents.
2. Community size should be designed so that housing, jobs, daily needs and other activities are within easy walking distance of each other.
3. As many activities as possible should be located within easy walking distance of transit stops.
4. A community should contain a diversity of housing types to enable citizens from a wide range of economic levels and age groups to live within its boundaries.
5. Businesses within the community should provide a range of job types for the community's residents.
6. The location and character of the community should be consistent with a larger transit network.
7. The community should have a center focus that combines commercial, civic, cultural and recreational uses.
8. The community should contain an ample supply of specialized open space in the form of squares, greens and parks whose frequent use is encouraged through placement and design.
9. Public spaces should be designed to encourage the attention and presence of people at all hours of the day and night.
10. Each community or cluster of communities should have a well defined edge, such as agricultural greenbelts or wildlife corridors, permanently protected from development.
11. Streets, pedestrian paths and bike paths should contribute to a system of fully-connected and interesting routes to all destinations. Their design should encourage pedestrian and bicycle use by being small and spatially defined by buildings, trees and lighting; and by discouraging high speed traffic.
12. Wherever possible, the natural terrain, drainage, and vegetation of the community should be preserved, with superior examples contained within parks or greenbelts.
13. The community design should help conserve resources and minimize waste.
14. Communities should provide for the efficient use of water through the use of natural drainage, drought tolerant landscaping and recycling.
15. The street orientation, the placement of buildings and the use of shading should contribute to the energy efficiency of the community.

Regional Principles:

1. The regional land use planning structure should be integrated within a larger transportation network built around transit rather than freeways.
2. Regions should be bounded by and provide a continuous system of greenbelt/wildlife corridors to be determined by natural conditions.
3. Regional institutions and services (government, stadiums, museums, etc.) should be located in the urban core.
4. Materials and methods of construction should be specific to the region, exhibiting continuity of history and culture and compatibility with the climate to encourage the development of local character and community identity.

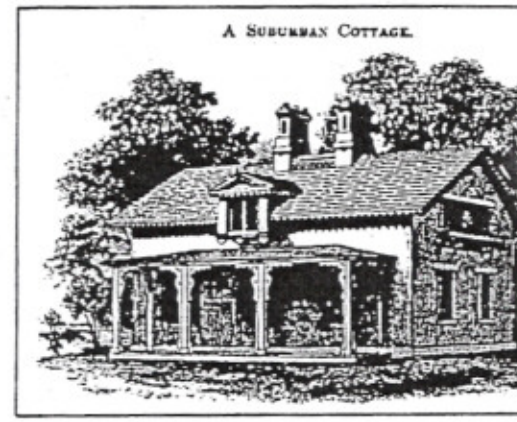
Implementation Strategy:

1. The general plan should be updated to incorporate the above principles.
2. Rather than allowing developer-initiated, piecemeal development, local governments should take charge of the planning process. General plans should designate where new growth, infill or redevelopment will be allowed to occur.
3. Prior to any development, a specific plan should be prepared based on these planning principles. With the adoption of specific plans, complying projects could proceed with minimal delay.
4. Plans should be developed through an open process and participants in the process should be provided visual models of all planning proposals.

Influences and Precedents

The New Urbanism is the latest in a long line of reform movements that have sought to apply new design and planning principles to metropolitan areas and, especially, to new suburban neighborhoods. Like the New Urbanism, many of these previous reform movements have contained an element of utopianism. However, not all of them have been built on the same philosophy as the New Urbanism, and some have included ideas that run counter to New Urbanist principles.

"The desire to fashion a retreat from the unruly world of power and gain has existed for as long as the proceeds from that world made it possible," writes Nancy Stieber, an art historian at the University of Massachusetts/Boston.[4] Early nineteenth-century influences on planned suburbs ranged from pastoral cemeteries such as Mt. Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts (1831) to the domestic architecture and landscape designs published by Andrew Jackson Downing in the 1840s and 1850s, and the 1858 plan for New York's Central Park by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux.



From A.J. Downing's *Cottage Residences, Rural Architec and Landscape Gardening.*

The seductive power of suburbanization accelerated in the late nineteenth century as the industrial revolution made cities larger and more machine-like. At the same time, the growing middle class could now afford to move from older urban neighborhoods to new homes in naturalistic settings on the outskirts. From the industrial city arose not just a desire to escape but a desire to experience a convivial "village life" with its image of a more human scale and tightly knit sense of community.

The City Beautiful Movement

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the flowering of several trends in architecture and urban planning that provided the fertile soil within which the New Urbanism was later planted. For example, the City Beautiful movement borrowed heavily from France's Beaux Arts school of architecture. With its emphasis on civic buildings, plazas and landscaped parks, this movement sought, in the words of Todd Bressi, to "impose a sense of order, civility and purpose on chaotic industrial cities."[5]

City Beautiful characteristics can also be seen in the handsome "streetcar suburbs" built between approximately 1890 and 1920. Though the designs of these early suburbs were not as self-consciously monumental as their downtown counterparts, they still emphasized formalistic, gridded streetscapes oriented around local transit stops.[6]

Working in emerging suburbs and resort or factory towns, some urban designers during the go-go years of the 1920s adopted a similar emphasis on public spaces, civic buildings and orderly neighborhoods. They used a particular set of urban design principles to shape these new urban forms on a more human scale—again seeking to incorporate an ideal of village life into modern urban settings.

The work of John Nolen, one of the leading urban designers of the early twentieth century, is often cited as a model of this type of planning. In factory towns, in the Florida boom towns of the 1920s, and in "showcase" towns such as Mariemont, Ohio, Nolen developed a style characterized by planning historian

Mel Scott as "rather formal, almost baroque, street arrangements with naturalistic parks and open spaces," as well as a strong emphasis on public buildings and public spaces.[7]

Peter Katz, author of *The New Urbanism: Toward an Architecture of Community*, has said that the period between 1900 and 1920 produced most of the prototypes for today's New Urbanist work. Andres Duany, the most outspoken of New Urbanist designers, has often stated that the problem with postwar American suburbs is that their designers completely forgot everything that was learned during this earlier period. Indeed, many of Duany's town plans, with modified grid street patterns oriented around town squares and public buildings, look as though they could have been designed by Nolen.

> Questioning the "new" in New Urbanism is perhaps what is really at the root of any criticism of the movement.
>
> — John Kaliski

The Garden City Movement

Another movement emerging out of the new profession of city planning at the turn of the century also sought to create a "sense of place" and restore the notion of village life to modern urban development. But this Garden City movement was less formalistic, more oriented toward "green" natural areas, parks and walkways that safely isolated neighborhood activity from the street.

The Garden City movement began with English designer Ebenezer Howard's ideal for creating self-contained "new towns" built for workers and surrounded by greenbelts on the metropolitan fringe. The "garden suburb" ideas of English designer Raymond Unwin also offered inspiration for neighborhoods.[8] In America, this movement was promoted by a group of designers—organized as the Regional Planning Association of America—who sought to restore village life by taking a different and less obviously "urban" approach to creating communities.

Led by such figures as Clarence Stein and Henry Wright, the American Garden City designers also sought to maintain a village atmosphere, accommodate the automobile, and incorporate farmland and natural areas into their designs. Where-as Nolen and others oriented their designs around urban streets (a principle many New Urbanists would later adopt), Stein and his associates sought to create a rigid separation between automobile and pedestrian traffic by using overpasses and greenways.

Plan of Radburn, New Jersey

The Garden City designers also adopted the concept of the "neighborhood unit"—a large suburban block that prevented through traffic, broke the grid system within, and oriented itself around green space and school sites. The Garden City approach—more suburban, at least on the surface—was perhaps best executed at Stein's new towns in Radburn, New Jersey, built in 1927, and Greenbelt, Maryland, built as part of a federal program in the 1930s.

These two movements were not as far apart in principle as the descriptions might suggest. Lewis Mumford stated that all American urban planning derives from the romantic, curvilinear design for Central Park by Olmsted and Vaux.[9] Many years later, Peter Calthorpe claims that, in fact, the many competing traditions had a great deal in common—especially their commitment to compact village-like towns oriented around rail stations.[10]

Postwar Suburbanization and New Towns

In their purest form, all the earlier approaches fell by the wayside in the rush of postwar American suburbanization. In bastardized form, however, the Garden City approach came to dominate suburban planning during this period. Though derided by Mumford and other Garden City leaders, the typical postwar suburb actually was an auto-dominated derivation of their idea, complete with the neighborhood unit that insulated the interior residential streets from through traffic speeding along arterial routes lined with strip malls. The Garden City model was also better adapted to subdivisions of ranch houses, "capes" and other small housing styles than were the more urban, formal towns and villages designed by Nolen and others.

From the 1920s through the 1980s, virtually all American "new towns" —both private and government-sponsored—were built along this model, including the federal "greenbelt" towns of the 1930s, the 1960s private new towns of Columbia and Reston, and the towns built as part of the federal "New Communities" program in the 1970s. The famous Village Homes development in Davis, California, is also a Garden City development. And most private "master planned" communities—especially those in Southern California and Florida—follow an altered Garden City model to some extent, with greenways, walking paths, and houses or apartments positioned along golf courses.

The surface pastoral values of the Garden City movement were not openly challenged until the 1960s, when Jane Jacobs, in her landmark book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, reasserted the value of life in an "urban village" and, especially, the usefulness of the street as a center of activity for both people and cars. In the 1970s—coincident with the emergence of a more historically oriented "postmodern" architecture and the growth of the historic preservation movement—more traditional forms of urban design began to re-emerge.

Perhaps the landmark event in this arena came in 1979, when Alexander Cooper and Stan Eckstut unveiled their plan for Battery Park City, a "new-town-in-town" on 92 acres of landfill in Manhattan. Though the project does not afford an easy connection to the rest of Manhattan, Cooper and Eckstut chose to mimic the borough's grid street system and wrote strict design guidelines that sought (and successfully achieved) the re-creation of a typical urban New York neighborhood.

> Like the modernists, the new urbanists rely too much on esthetic solutions to the social problems created by urban sprawl.
>
> — Herbert Muschamp, *New York Times*

Three years later, Miami-based architects and planners Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk designed Seaside, Florida, the 80-acre resort town on the Gulf Coast that became the national poster child for a phenomenon which has come to be known as "neotraditional planning." In 1989, California architect Peter Calthorpe and University of Washington designer Doug Kelbaugh published a small booklet called *The Pedestrian Pocket Book*, which outlined how small, mixed-use suburban developments might be built in a pedestrian-friendly way and later linked to a regional transit system.

Since 1990, a disparate group of designers has emerged as a full-fledged "movement" that has named itself "The New Urbanism." Though Garden City values are by no means rejected—indeed, some of the New Urbanism's greatest advocates are Garden City devotees—the movement is generally characterized by a rejection of "conventional" suburban planning as it has emerged since World War II and a desire to create an alternative model, both for the neighborhood and for the region.

Congress for the New Urbanism

As New Urbanism has grown and expanded its influence, one organization has emerged to speak for the movement: the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU). Originally formed in 1993 as a small "invitation only" group, CNU now claims some 500 members.[11]

Prior to CNU's formation, the movement's disparate followers used many different names to describe what they were doing: "neotraditional planning," "neotraditional development," "traditional neighborhood development," "transit-oriented development" and the creation of "pedestrian pockets."

Architect and CNU advocate Doug Kelbaugh of the University of Washington points out that the original members came from many diverse backgrounds, ranging from environmental and passive solar design to Euro-American neoclassical approaches to architecture. Even the selection of CNU's name was the result of a contentious debate among these design pioneers.

The first three of CNU's annual "congresses" dealt with New Urbanist design elements such as neighborhoods, buildings, blocks, streets and regions. The fourth congress, held in May 1996 in Charleston, South Carolina, was devoted to developing an agenda for action. It resulted in a charter (reprinted here in part) that goes well beyond the earlier, narrow emphasis on neotraditional design.

> But there's no school, no church, no supermarket here [in Seaside]—just gourmet food boutiques and upscale shops. Community life is nil. And nearly everyone around town is a tourist, architecture buff, or second-home shopper.
>
> — Christina Binkley, *Wall Street Journal*

CHARTER OF THE NEW URBANISM 1996

The Congress for the New Urbanism

views disinvestment in central cities, the spread of placeless sprawl, increasing separation by race and income, environmental deterioration, loss of agricultural lands and wilderness, and the erosion of society's built heritage as one interrelated community-building challenge.

We Stand

for the restoration of existing urban centers and towns within coherent metropolitan regions, the reconfiguration of sprawling suburbs into communities of real neighborhoods and diverse districts, the conservation of natural environments, and the preservation of our built legacy.

We Recognize

that physical solutions by themselves will not solve social and economic problems, but neither can economic vitality, community stability, and environmental health be sustained without a coherent and supportive physical framework.

We Advocate

the restructuring of public policy and development practices to support the following principles: neighborhoods should be diverse in use and population; communities should be designed for the pedestrian and transit as well as the car; cities and towns should be shaped by physically defined and universally accessible public spaces and community institutions; urban places should be framed by architecture and landscape design that celebrate local history, climate, ecology, and building practice.

We Represent

a broad-based citizenry, composed of public and private sector leaders, community activists, and multidisciplinary professionals. We are committed to reestablishing the relationship between the art of building and the making of community, through citizen-based participatory planning and design.

We Dedicate

ourselves to reclaiming our homes, blocks, streets, parks, neighborhoods, districts, towns, cities, regions, and environment.

SEASIDE, FLORIDA

For many years, this 80-acre resort development on Florida's Gulf Coast was the "poster child" for New Urbanism—for the simple reason that it was virtually the only existing project built to New Urbanist principles.

Designed in 1981-82 by Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk Architects and Planners of Miami, Florida, for developer Robert Davis, Seaside attempted to break the area's condo-and-motel-strip atmosphere by creating a stately, pedestrian-oriented atmosphere that emphasizes public spaces and waterfront access. The town includes space for 750 dwelling units, as well as such amenities as a town hall, an open-air market, and a tiny Neoclassical post office, which Duany has always claimed was built with money saved by not building "gold-plated" streets

Seaside's streets are perhaps its most identifiable characteristic. Most are only 18 feet wide, providing an intimate streetscape. Originally they were paved with crushed shells, though later red-brick pavers were added. The architectural design of the individual buildings varies dramatically from vernacular Southern to modern styles, yet Seaside's urban code mandates lot sizes, setbacks, landscape regulations and other design guidelines that help to define the streetscape.

Seaside has been criticized as a prototype for new community development because of its small size and its dominant resort-based economy. Nevertheless, ever since the embryonic stages of the New Urbanism in the early 1980s, it has proved to be a powerful symbol.

Promises to Keep and Challenges to Meet

Though the New Urbanism has gained considerable acceptance in the last few years, it remains controversial. Many critics believe that, while the New Urbanism contains many attractive ideas, it is unable to deal with a wide range of issues associated with suburban and metropolitan growth that simply did not exist in the early twentieth century when its planning and design predecessors were being implemented. These issues generally fall into five broad and overlapping categories:

Scale: Can a set of design principles that seeks to recreate traditional small-town neighborhoods accommodate or compete with the massive "big-box" retailers and workplaces that now dominate the American economy?

Transportation: Can the New Urbanism actually relieve traffic congestion, offer realistic transportation alternatives for residents and change their travel behavior, as its advocates claim?

Planning and Codes: Can the New Urbanism be integrated into local plans and building codes, which tend to represent a very different and less flexible tradition of community planning and development?

Regionalism: Can the New Urbanism move successfully beyond planning on a neighborhood scale to create a compelling vision of metropolitan growth?

Marketing: Can the New Urbanism find success in a marketplace that seems so skeptical of many of its ideals?

Because the New Urbanism is still in its infancy, there are no definitive answe to any of these questions. A brief exploration of them, however, may help to illuminate alternative approaches to addressing the concerns and finding ways to incorporate New Urbanist principles into twenty-first century American life.

Scale: How Big is Too Big?

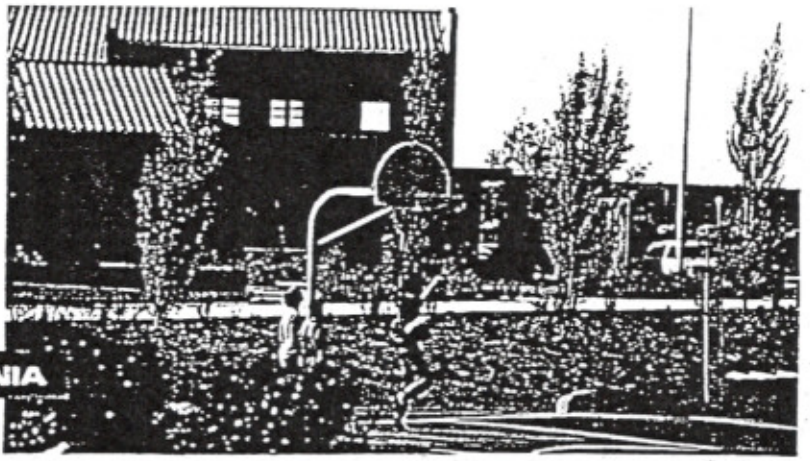
When critics say that the New Urbanists are mere nostalgia peddlers, often a not they are talking about scale. The traditional neighborhoods that the New Urbanists hope to replicate are characterized by compactness, small scale ar diversity of building types. But, increasingly, the economic and lifestyle demanc of urban and suburban life seem to require facilities on a massive scale.

When giving his standard speech promoting the New Urbanism, Andres Duar often shows a favorite photograph of older neighborhoods in Galveston, Texas He emphasizes that the key to the neighborhood's success is not the uses of the buildings in this neighborhood, but rather their scale. Because they were built individually at an earlier point in urban history, they are small yet variable size and style. This gives the neighborhood a village character impossible to replicate in a conventional "cookie-cutter" subdivision.

To New Urbanism's critics, Duany's Galveston pitch is nostalgia-peddling at its worst. Small buildings may be visually appealing in a Disneyland-Main Street way, the critics argue, but they are hardly viable economically. The scale of commerce has become so vast that it precludes the New Urbanism.

Perhaps the best examples of this scale problem are the "big-box" retailers ai the modern industrial and corporate office buildings. The big-box retailers, sui as Wal-Mart or SuperK, are so named because they are just that: a big box. order to vacuum up retail dollars that used to go to locally owned neighborho

LAGUNA WEST, CALIFORNIA



Laguna West, located in suburban Sacramento, California, was the first New Urbanist project designed by San Francisco architect Peter Calthorpe. In 1988, Calthorpe and Seattle architect Doug Kelbaugh created their first "pedestrian pocket"—a finite, compact node of pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods—between two auto-oriented Seattl suburbs, then linked their new community to the metropolis by transit (the railroad track was already in use).

Two years later, Sacramento developer Phil Angelides, a prominent figure in California Democratic politics, asked Calthorpe to apply those principles to the 1,045-acre Laguna West site 11 miles south of Sacramento. Angelides' action was remarkable because he already had county permits for a more conventional project of residential subdivisic and office parks on the site.

Calthorpe designed a 3,400-unit mixed-density project, including a 100-acre town center of civic and retail buildings, that followed most of the New Urbanist principles. The project ultimately contained more single-family homes than Calthorpe's idea proposed, and it included some cul-de-sacs, which are normally anathema to New Urbanists. It al called for the creation of a large lake, small neighborhood parks and ret development. Calthorpe went to great lengths to get public works officia to permit narrower streets, some with trees planted in the parking strip

Coming onto the market in 1991 just as California's real estate recessio hit, Laguna West was troubled financially from the beginning. The scattered nature of its early development and higher prices harmed competitiveness with surrounding conventional subdivisions. But soon afterwards Apple Computer made a major commitment with a new employment center just across the arterial from the project, within a five-minute walk of many residences.

stores, their space requirements are enormous and thus nearly impossible to work into a New Urbanist scheme. Even smaller enterprises, critics say, cannot hope to operate on the pedestrian-oriented neighborhood scale that New Urbanists advocate. A neighborhood drug store might orient itself toward local pedestrian traffic, but it would still depend on attracting patrons from more distant neighborhoods who would arrive by car.

> To me, the concept of new urbanism embraces many of the qualities that made Quincy [Florida] a wonderful place to live. Tree-lined streets, welcoming front porches, mixed uses . . . a diversity of housing types and prices . . . distinctive civic buildings . . . a true sense of community.
>
> —Joel Embry, *Foresight*

The industrial building has a similar scale problem. Many successful older urban neighborhoods were "factory-gate" neighborhoods, so named because they were clustered tightly around the factory that provided jobs for residents who arrived on foot or by streetcars and buses.

Detroit planning consultant Albert Bogdan has shown that the space needs of modern industry make factory-gate neighborhoods impossible to replicate. He compared the Model T Ford plant in Highland Park, Michigan, which was built in 1920, with the General Motors Poletown Cadillac plant, which was recently built with the assistance of the City of Detroit.[12] The Model T plant occupied 100 acres and employed 70,000 people, or 700 jobs per acre. The Poletown plant, by contrast, requires 500 acres and employs 5,000 people, or 10 jobs per acre. To recreate an employment base similar to the Model T plant, Bogdan says, would require 11 square miles—three times the size of the City of Highland Park. Much of that space would have to be devoted to employee parking.

For large-scale operations such as big-box retailers and factories, New Urbanists mostly concede the point, though some still claim that their ideas are workable for smaller-scale retailers. Others simply reject the need for large-scale facilities or argue that small and varied building forms, not the apparent needs of residents or commercial real estate users, should dictate urban form. This apparent conflict is surely one of the most vexing in the entire New Urbanism movement.

Peter Calthorpe distinguishes between "comparison" retail and "convenience" retail.[13] By comparison retail he means the large-scale stores that people will drive to in order to obtain low prices and a wide range of product choices. These stores are difficult to work into New Urbanist schemes. By convenience retail he means dry cleaners, shoe repair shops, and other specialty retail businesses that can survive on local trade. Given somewhat higher densities and a pedestrian- and transit-friendly orientation, these businesses can thrive within New Urbanist plans—just as they do in older urban neighborhoods throughout America.

In Laguna West, Calthorpe adopted a hybrid approach. Faced with the need to integrate a supermarket and large drug store into the development, he chose to "face" the stores in both directions. Fronting the arterial road, these stores are auto-oriented. Fronting the Laguna West town center, however, they are integrated into the small-scale, pedestrian-oriented retail and civic areas that lead to the residential neighborhoods.

New Urbanism, like its predecessors, offers a range of strategies for encouraging pedestrian shopping, but has a harder time providing local opportunities for employment. If large workplaces do not fit into the plan, where are people supposed to earn a living? Not everyone can work at the limited number of small-scale retail shops and service-sector employers. This apparent mismatch of employment needs and the types of workplaces deemed appropriate to New Urbanist design is another serious challenge to the economic viability of these communities.

ALLEYS

The New Urbanism includes many different neotraditional neighborhood design principles, but perhaps none has engendered as much controversy as the use of alleys—small lanes behind houses on adjacent streets—which have always been an important feature of American urban neighborhoods.

Traditionally, alleys have served several functions, including as a place to park cars (and, in earlier times, horses and their provisions). Alleys are often used as a service corridor for utilities and trash collection, thereby leaving the streets more attractive and conducive to pedestrian activity. Alleys have also served as a place for a greater variety of housing types, such as modest apartments located above garages or cottages behind larger houses.

Alley dwellings began to fall into disfavor after the Civil War, when a growing black population settled along the alleys of Washington, D.C., and local authorities there began closing them off or converting them to streets in an attempt to "clean them up." Grady Clay has written that Congress forbade the use of alleys for dwellings in 1918, and during the New Deal local authorities closed off more than 40 alleys in the city, eliminating more than 500 alley dwellings." Today, however, some surviving alley residences in the fashionable Georgetown section are almost as expensive as homes on the streets themselves.

Though alleys had been a feature of many early-twentieth-century suburbs, they disappeared in the rapid suburbanization of the nation after World War II. Alleys could not accommodate increasingly large automobiles, and the philosophy of the suburban "superblock" had no use for the traditional street and alley grid.

The New Urbanists have revived alleys as an essential part of their pedestrian-oriented streetscape and as a means of providing diverse housing types. Alleys, they argue, can help to reduce the automobile's visual prominence by placing garages in back of the house and eliminating curb cuts and driveways along the street. Alleys also make the streetscape more attractive by moving trash containers and utilities to the rear of the house.

Critics of the New Urbanism frequently attack alleys as a leading example of the impracticality of the New Urbanist approach. Alleys may have been fine in safer times, they argue, but in today's cities and suburbs they are likely to breed filth and crime. At the same time that the New Urbanists are promoting alleys in new suburbs, the prominent urban designer Oscar Newman, best known for his book *Defensible Space*, advocates for closing them down in the cities. In general, Newman argues that "public" space will be safest (especially in poor neighborhoods) when it is tightly defined and local residents can claim ownership of it.

In response, the New Urbanists claim that their vision for alleys does include a strong sense of ownership by local residents. In fact, New Urbanists usually say that alleys benefit from a resident population living in "granny flats" above the garage facing the alley. This design permits the introduction of low-cost dwelling units, and New Urbanists claim the residents will help deter crime and vandalism in the alley and adjoining back yards. The jury is still out on whether these units are truly offering affordable housing or just a space for a home office or studio for the owner of the adjacent property.

Transportation: Using Design to Change Travel Behavior

Transportation is perhaps the most contentious single aspect of the New Urbanism. New Urbanist plans are often "sold" to public officials based on their supposed transportation benefits, including reduced dependence on the automobile, increased transit use, and a more flexible road system that creates a more extensive hierarchy of streets. This planning concept is appealing to some officials who envision reducing local traffic problems and meeting federally mandated clean air standards. But critics frequently doubt whether these benefits will actually materialize once New Urbanist projects are built.

It is an article of faith among New Urbanists that urban design following New Urbanist principles will give residents more transportation choices and therefore reduce vehicle trips and/or vehicle miles traveled. If more residences are located within a quarter-mile walking distance of shops, schools and transit stops, the argument goes, more trips will be taken on foot or bicycle through pleasant pathways that are part of the New Urbanist designs. New Urbanists also argue that bus transit can work even at relatively low single-family densities of 12-16 units per acre. This represents only a modest increase from current suburban densities, especially in areas where high land costs have already driven lot sizes down.

Another argument the New Urbanists make—one that is increasingly being used in their efforts to revise the thinking of traffic engineers—is that gridded street networks accommodate traffic better than conventional suburban street systems.

A conventional suburban street hierarchy will typically consist of only three types of streets: local streets serving residences and often on dead-end cul-de-sacs; collector streets "collecting" vehicles from local streets; and arterial streets connecting different neighborhoods and districts to one another. Such street systems are deliberately designed to keep through traffic off residential streets. But this hierarchical, tree-like pattern is limiting and inflexible, New Urbanists say, because it forces virtually all traffic through a limited number of intersections at the arterial streets.

A New Urbanist street system, by contrast, is more subtle. By using a grid (or a modified grid) to create more through streets, a New Urbanist system will increase traffic somewhat on residential streets. But it will also give motorists many more options in driving from one place to another, and will reduce congestion on arterial streets. A grid system, combined with New Urbanist neighborhoods, may also reduce vehicle miles traveled because car trips to local stores and offices will be less frequent and shorter. And, some New Urbanists contend, a grid system may actually increase the capacity of the road system by providing more left-turn options—a difficult bottleneck in most road systems.

New Urbanists have also strongly advocated creating pedestrian- and transit-friendly districts by redeveloping older suburban areas, especially older suburban shopping malls. Although most shoppers may arrive at these malls by car, they will be engaged in a pedestrian-oriented setting that connects previously disparate elements, reducing their car use for short trips within the shopping district. Some New Urbanists call this the "Park Once" idea—the notion that while people may arrive at a destination by car, they will need only to "park once" to do their business.

All these assertions make common sense, but they are not as yet backed up by much empirical evidence. Perhaps the most often cited New Urbanist traffic analysis (which has been influential in changing the views of the Institute for Transportation Engineers) is the 1990 study by Florida traffic specialists Walter Kulash, Joe Anglin, and David Marks.[15] Running a computer simulation of a conventional subdivision and a New Urbanist neighborhood with identical development characteristics, the Kulash study found that the New Urbanist plan would generate only 57 percent of the vehicle miles traveled in the conventional suburban plan.

Yet scholarly analysts are skeptical. Randall Crane of the University of California, Irvine, points out that the Kulash study did not analyze whether, if typical trip distances were reduced, the total number of trips might actually increase. Kulash, Crane points out, "assumed that away."[16] Crane's own research shows little correlation between street patterns and residents' choices about driving or walking, but he notes, "empirical work still has a long way to go in connecting land use and subdivision design to travel behavior."[17]

Susan Handy of the University of Texas suggests that, in pedestrian- and transit-friendly neighborhoods, residents are not likely to replace very many car trips with walking trips. The new walking trips may be in addition to, rather than substituting for, vehicle trips.[18]

Given the incomplete and conflicting information on travel behavior, it is difficult to assess the probable impact of the New Urbanism on transportation. Unfortunately, discussions of transportation tend to be "theological" in nature, with any particular person's viewpoint depending on his or her religion. The New Urbanists believe their ideas will noticeably affect how people move around in their neighborhoods; traffic engineering critics don't believe it. In the meantime, families continue to spend greater shares of their budgets on cars and related expenses.

Perhaps the best that can be said is that it is easy to walk to a store in a New Urbanist neighborhood but nearly impossible in a conventional suburban subdivision. Thus, New Urbanist designs may be a necessary step toward changing the way people travel, but not sufficient by themselves.

Planning and Codes: Negotiating with Local Officials

One of Andres Duany's favorite public-speaking stunts is to take the local zoning code and dump it in the wastebasket. This act—which invariably draws applause from the local planners who must administer the code—is Duany's way of drawing attention to the incompatibility between standard planning and zoning codes and New Urbanist principles.

In large part, these codes are the result of the planning philosophy of conventional suburbs, which emphasizes reducing densities and orienting the community around the automobile. This approach reinforces segregated land uses, wide streets, extensive off-street parking for both residential and commercial facilities, generous setback requirements, low "lot coverage" requirements (meaning buildings cannot be built too closely to one another), and landscaping features, such as berms, that New Urbanists disdain.

Furthermore, such codes are often the province of powerful local bureaucrats—not just planners, but also traffic engineers, fire chiefs, public works directors and building inspectors—who are loathe to change them. Traditionally, traffic engineers have preferred wider streets, less on-street parking, more cul-de-sacs and a rigid street hierarchy. Fire chiefs have also advocated for wide streets to allow turning room for their emergency vehicles.

Traffic engineering guru Paul Box, who wrote the original residential street standards for the Institute of Transportation Engineers, has ridiculed many aspects of the New Urbanism. In a 1991 interview, he called narrower streets "a step backward" and said that replacing shopping malls with traditional shopping neighborhoods might be unsafe, because they would subject shoppers to the hazards of crossing busy streets.[19]

It has not been easy for New Urbanists to surmount these obstacles. When Peter Calthorpe designed Laguna West, for example, he was forced into lengthy negotiations with the Sacramento County Public Works Department over many aspects of neighborhood design. Calthorpe won most of his battles, but not without a struggle. In order to convince the fire chief to narrow the streets, Calthorpe even videotaped a fire truck traveling down a skinny street to prove that it was feasible.[20]

In recent years, New Urbanists and code-oriented officials have managed to find more common ground. The Institute for Transportation Engineers has been working on a new set of street standards oriented toward New Urbanist neighborhoods. In some cases, local officials have been willing to permit non-standard development patterns, so long as streets and other common spaces have remained private instead of being turned over to public agencies.

Yet many aspects of plans and codes remain contentious, as local officials defend their existing codes on the basis of familiarity, public safety and compatibility with surrounding land uses. In many communities, conventional suburban values have both political and bureaucratic support, and it remains for both New Urbanists and local officials to sort out which codes should be changed and which should be retained.

"Pioneering is very hard," says Memphis developer Henry Turley. "Today's home buyers often look to housing for investment as much as shelter. They fear uncertainty and 'different' neighbors; many have lost their architectural literacy after decades in faceless auto suburbs."

— Neal R. Peirce, *Nation's Cities Weekly*

HARBOR TOWN, TENNESSEE

The prototype for New Urbanism on an infill site appears to be Harbor Town, a 110-acre low-rise residential village built on an island between the Wolf and Mississippi rivers adjacent to downtown Memphis. Designed by RTKL Associates Inc. for developer Henry Turley, Harbor Town will have 891 units of mixed residential development, along with a town square, a school and an inn. A marina, yacht club and linear park provide access along the riverfront.

Harbor Town showed early success, with all 350 apartments leased and 150 single-family homes sold in the first two years. This is an impressive achievement considering the community's large variety of housing types. More recently, however, residential sales have slowed considerably, falling behind market competitors.

In design terms, Harbor Town has deliberately mimicked the street grid and frame houses in the Memphis area dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The single-family residences fit onto 40-foot-wide lots, and many buildings include such design features as front porches and balconies. Proximity to downtown Memphis makes the prospect of a viable "Main Street" commercial area quite promising in the long run.

From its inception, the New Urbanism movement has been linked by its promoters to social equity ideals, including affordable housing and community participation. Most of the leading New Urbanists advocate a mix of housing types and prices in the communities they design, and often point to "granny flats," for example, as a way of providing affordable small apartments that are integrated into gracious neighborhoods. However, many of the early New Urbanist communities have actually been targeted to high-income homebuyers, leading to charges that New Urbanism is elitist in nature.

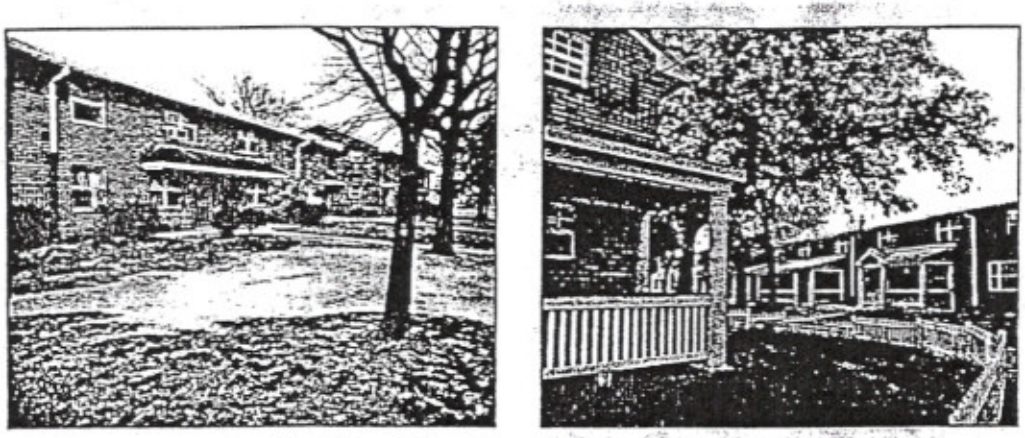
In a promising new effort called HOPE VI, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has embraced the New Urbanism as a tool that can be used to assist residents in transforming public housing. This multibillion-dollar program includes the planned demolition of high-rise public housing and its replacement with low-rise townhouses and other housing types that complement the surrounding neighborhood. The program has other, non-design goals, including creating mixed-income communities and using public housing to develop a "campus of learners" to enhance family self-sufficiency through training, education and supportive services.

HOPE VI has adopted New Urbanist principles in its design guidelines and is working closely with many of the movement's leading architects and planners. At the Congress for New Urbanism meeting in May 1996, HUD Secretary Henry Cisneros delivered a ringing endorsement of New Urbanism in general and its application to public housing in particular. He said HUD's goal was to "combine features of traditional community planning with new ways of organizing daily life in a rapidly changing world."[21]

In redesigning public housing, the program seeks to reduce densities, create safer environments and integrate housing better into the existing community through new street grids, parks and squares, and facilities such as schools and shopping areas. A longer-term goal is to move people from public housing to home ownership.

To date, 38 public housing authorities across the nation have received HUD funds to replace or renovate some of the most dilapidated and dangerous buildings. Three "best practices" examples cited by HUD are Diggs Town in Norfolk, Virginia, Harbor Point in Boston, and Earle Village in Charlotte, North Carolina.

> Overall, neotraditionalism [also known as new urbanism] is simply one of many valuable approaches to consider in strengthening social infrastructure in our nation's increasingly diverse and segmented housing markets.
>
> — John Martin, *Urban Land*



The barren open spaces of the 1950s public housing project at Diggs Town in Norfolk, Virginia, have been transformed into safer neighborhood streets with individual addresses, porches, and front and back yards. The Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority worked with UDA Architects and Diggs Town residents to redesign the project and build a cohesive community spirit in the process.

Regionalism: Neighborhood Design in Context

In the popular imagination, the New Urbanism is a movement dedicated to designing individual neighborhoods in a different way, especially in new suburbs. Indeed, most highly publicized New Urbanist projects have been new neighborhoods built near—or even beyond—the edge of large metropolitan areas. And New Urbanists from Florida to California have helped to design large master-planned communities (up to 10,000 acres) on undeveloped land or land formerly used for agriculture.

This has led to concern among many planners and environmentalists that New Urbanism is simply a "political marketing tool" for developers seeking approval for large development projects that would otherwise be rejected by planning authorities. In response to this criticism, New Urbanists have attempted in recent years to incorporate regionalist ideas into their philosophy.

From the beginning, the New Urbanists have argued that there is more to their movement than simply designing better suburban neighborhoods. Indeed, many of the roots of the New Urbanism lie in redevelopment and urban "infill" projects, such as New York's Battery Park City, Seattle Commons and Ghent Square in Norfolk, Virginia. The New Urbanists have long argued that their strategy will fail unless it is used to revive struggling downtowns and inner-city neighborhoods.

They have also argued that their neighborhood-building principles can and should be applied across a broad spectrum of situations—not just emerging suburbs, but also in underutilized and abandoned industrial sites, struggling inner-ring suburbs, and small towns outside the metropolitan area altogether. And they have expressed support for such regulatory tools as urban growth boundaries, which are designed to limit suburban sprawl and help shape the metropolis.

Yet actually bringing a "New Regionalism" into focus has proven difficult. Perhaps the New Urbanists who have worked hardest to try to establish a regional approach are Doug Kelbaugh and Peter Calthorpe. Kelbaugh has organized a dozen design charrettes, many for state and local governments, that lay down a regional mosaic of strategic development proposals for the Puget Sound area.

Unlike many other New Urbanists, Calthorpe has worked not just for private developers but for many government agencies—especially regional agencies such as counties and transit districts, which have a broader view in mind. His chapter in *The New Urbanism* on "The Region" suggests that the best way to apply New Urbanist principles regionally is to view the region as analogous to the neighborhood:

> There should be well-defined edges (i.e., Urban Growth Boundaries), the circulation system should function for the pedestrian (i.e., supported by regional transit systems), public space should be formative rather than residual (i.e., preservation of major open-space networks), civic and private domains should form a complementary hierarchy (i.e., related cultural centers, commercial districts and residential neighborhoods), and population and use should be diverse (i.e., created by adequate affordable housing and jobs/housing balance). Developing such an architecture of the region creates the context for a healthy urbanism in neighborhoods, districts, and at the city center. The two forms of urbanism work together.[22]

This approach to regionalism seems to dictate the use of specific planning tools, such as regional transit systems, open space plans and urban growth boundaries. Yet even Calthorpe acknowledges that sometimes "urban and suburban infill cannot accommodate the quantity or rate of growth of a region," and in those cases "new growth areas and satellite towns may be considered."[23] Calthorpe is careful to lay down New Urbanist principles that should be followed in satellite towns, but the dilemma is clear: How do New Urbanists reconcile their desire to shape suburban development on a clean slate with their desire to reinforce existing urban patterns?

Concern about regionalism has arisen among others within the New Urbanism movement, as suggested by a recent manifesto by three prominent planner/designers in the Northeast. Following a 1995 meeting of the Congress for the New Urbanism dealing with regional issues, Massachusetts landscape architect Harry Dodson, Robert Yaro of the Regional Plan Association in New York, and Armando Carbonell of the Cape Cod Commission issued a New Regionalist challenge to the New Urbanists.[24] Seeking to link New Urbanism to regional environmental concerns and the "sustainable development" movement, these regionalists expressed concern about two related issues: "New Urban Sprawl" and "New Edifice Complex."

"Failure to base the New Urbanism in regional and environmental thinking could result in hundreds or perhaps thousands of attractive Charleston, Nantucket, and Seaside look-alikes springing up across the American landscape wherever large landowners and developers happen to own a suitable piece of land," they wrote. They added that if the New Urbanism is simply used to gratify the egos of architects, as Modernism was, then "new towns could replace buildings as objects to be placed at will on the landscape, with even greater negative consequences."

To address these potential problems, the regionalists have put forth four principles they believe New Urbanists should adopt to implement "The New Regionalism":

1. design with regions in mind since they "embody the basic environmental, cultural, and economic unit within which we all live and work."
2. build upon each region's natural and cultural structure to reveal its inherent potential through an intensive regional analysis, rather than impose standard planning solutions.
3. rebuild and reclaim existing communities first, before building on greenfield sites, especially where there is a well-developed network of older villages, towns and city centers.
4. provide people with meaningful choices about where and how they live, recognizing that citizens of every region have a wide range of needs, values and goals for themselves and their communities.

There is no question that the seductive visual power of New Urbanism's neighborhood-building concepts can be used to support real estate development projects which, from a regional point of view, are not justifiable. And there is no lack of working New Urbanist designers who will undertake these projects—either for their own personal gain, or because they fear that a conventional designer would produce much worse results. The issue of a regional context for the New Urbanism remains a difficult one, even for New Urbanists themselves.

The question of regionalism has become a core issue in the New Urbanism partly because of the philosophy's potential impact on land conservation. Advocates claim that by promoting compact development New Urbanism might reduce the amount of acreage converted from natural and agricultural uses to urban development, even while accommodating the same population and economic structure.

As America's metropolises have moved outward into new territory, especially in the last 15 years, land conservation advocates have taken an increasingly active role in shaping urban form. Some have focused on public acquisition of open space; others on creating partnerships between government and private landowners or land trusts.

Increasingly, however, land conservation advocates have sought to call attention to what they view as the problem of disappearing natural and agricultural land on the urban fringe.[23] The Regional Plan Association reported a few years ago, for example, that the size of the New York metropolitan area had grown by a third between 1964 and 1985 even though the region's population had grown by only 5 percent.[24]

The American Farmland Trust (AFT) has long been an active advocate for farmland preservation, and it recently sought to predict future urban development patterns in California's Central Valley, one of the world's most important breadbaskets.[25] AFT's study investigated whether those patterns could be significantly affected by the application of compact development strategies associated with the New Urbanism. The Central Valley is a useful example, because it has been the subject of considerable discussion among New Urbanists, several of whom have prepared master plans for major land developments in the area.

AFT examined an 11-county region that includes 6.7 million acres of irrigated farmland and contains the nation's top three counties ranked by agricultural production. California state demographers have predicted a tripling of the area's population, from 4 million to 12.2 million, in the next 45 years. AFT's researchers found that if current low-density patterns continue, about one million acres of farmland would be converted to urban development during this period, and another 2.5 million acres would be placed in a "zone of conflict" that would prevent full agricultural use.

The use of compact development patterns, according to the AFT report, could cut those figures by more than half, even while accommodating the same population. AFT also concluded that low-density development patterns would result in an operating deficit for local governments in the area, while compact patterns would lead to a surplus.

Not everyone accepts the "vanishing land" argument. The building industry, in particular, has countered that the amount of land converted to urban use each year (even in California) is not significant enough to cause concern. And the economic analysis in the AFT study assumes that California's property tax revenues will continue to be constrained by Proposition 13. But the study does suggest the broader policy landscape against which the New Urbanism must be examined.

Marketing: A Hard Sell in a Skeptical Marketplace

Whatever the underlying philosophy of earlier twentieth-century planning reformers, their efforts seem to have one thing in common: problems in the marketplace. This is not to say that consumers (homebuyers, shoppers, businesses) did not like them; many people preferred these alternative communities and continue to enjoy living and working in them. Rather, these reform efforts failed to reshape the larger real estate development industry in fundamental ways.

> "It's one thing to escape to Disney World for the weekend," Evan McKenzie, author of *Privatopia*, said. "It's another thing to take your whole family and flee there to live."
>
> — Brian McGrory, *Boston Sunday Globe*

Postwar developers cherry-picked ideas that they liked, and today's developers use the buzzwords of the New Urbanism (village, community, neighborhood) to try to sell their products, no matter what they really look like. One of New Urbanism's biggest challenges is to prove that the movement's ideas can "sell" in a still skeptical marketplace dominated by conventional developers.

It is axiomatic among the New Urbanists that consumers—and especially homebuyers—will get more for their money in a successful New Urbanist project than in a conventional subdivision. The neighborhood amenities are assumed to be far beyond those offered in a conventional tract. New Urbanists defend alleys and front porches as functional as well as pleasing architectural elements, and their neighborhood designs present a powerful visual image. As Peter Katz is fond of saying, even if there is a traditional neighborhood on the outside, you can still create a modern house, built to consumer tastes, on the inside.

Yet New Urbanist projects have encountered resistance from consumers, real estate developers, some town officials, and—perhaps most important—lenders. This resistance stems from four basic problems that can be paired as the product and its marketing and project cost and product pricing.

The Product and Its Marketing

From a marketing point of view, the "product" being offered for sale by New Urbanists is radically different from the conventional products that have dominated residential real estate for the last half-century. Consumers, developers and lenders all have a well-established set of expectations about what houses and neighborhoods will deliver. "Developers tell me that all people want to buy is lot size and views," Andres Duany recounts frequently. "And I tell them, that's because that's all you give them."

According to the New Urbanists, their "product" offers a different set of amenities in place of lot sizes and views: a village environment, walkable streets, a greater sense of community. These values are obvious in a well-established streetcar suburb or prewar neighborhood, but not in a proposed or brand-new community. They cannot be so easily quantified (for the lender or the buyer) as a big lot or an eye-popping view available at a specified higher price.

The general perception is that buying into a New Urbanist neighborhood without a track record involves more risk, and that makes lenders especially uncomfortable. A national study by Leland Consulting Group of Portland, Oregon, found that lenders preferred working with a developer who had a strong track record, financial capacity and proven experience in the product type. Lenders also expressed concern about the secondary market's willingness to lend on innovative projects.[28]

CELEBRATION, FLORIDA

If any development project incorporating New Urbanist principles is a commercial success on a large scale, it is likely to be Celebration, Florida, an 8,000-unit new community just beginning construction on 4,900 acres of Walt Disney Company property just south of EPCOT Center near Orlando.

The idea of a residential community was originally promoted by Walt Disney himself 30 years ago. Celebration is the result of a long planning process by the Disney Development Company, in which the community has evolved from a typical golf-course development project into a New Urbanist-style project designed by Robert A.M. Stern and Cooper, Robertson & Partners.

Though it does not adhere to all New Urbanist principles, the Celebration plan seeks to promote greater diversity among its anticipated 20,000 residents than do most existing neotraditional communities. It is also designed with an emphasis on social goals including education, health, technology and community. Celebration offers apartments or houses of varied sizes and prices built in one of six traditional design styles, and the plan features alleys, small neighborhood parks, and ample public spaces, including a lakeside town center.

Some critics fear that under Disney supervision the New Urbanism will, indeed, become little more than an exercise in nostalgia—and privately controlled nostalgia at that. Still, if any company has the marketing power to make their version of New Urbanism work, it is probably Disney.

Adding to this problem is inadequate market analysis for many New Urbanist projects. Conventional developers—and especially developers of "master-planned" communities—conduct extensive market research through both consumer surveys and focus groups. They have a very specific idea of who is likely to buy their homes and what those people want.

By contrast, real estate market analyst John Schleimer concludes that many New Urbanist developers have done "little or no market or consumer research . . . prior to site planning to determine the appropriate lots sizes, product mix and base pricing levels for the location."[29] These developers can be compared to the priests who believe religion will sell itself. The New Urbanists think they have such a great idea that their projects will find a market without any help.

New Urbanists have recently begun to acknowledge that marketing has been a problem, and some of them now state that New Urbanist projects must "go to school" to learn from the experience of conventional master-planned communities how to market to both lenders and consumers. Research on attracting retail stores and other small-scale commercial activity to these projects is also important to future success, but has been inadequate in many cases.

Some developers have begun to see New Urbanism as a way to differentiate their projects in a crowded marketplace. Developer Peter Kanavos of Flag/Avalon Development Co. says this is part of the reason he chose Duany Plater-Zyberk to design his 5,700-acre Avalon Park development outside Orlando. "Pound for pound with proper location, pricing, marketing and detailed development execution, I believe [New Urbanist communities] afford a marketing advantage," Kanavos states.[30]

Some New Urbanism advocates go even further, saying that the whole concept of real estate marketing must be turned on its head in order for New Urbanism to be successful. Peter Katz suggests that marketing of New Urbanist development projects must be more like the marketing of mature neighborhoods and less like the marketing of new suburban subdivisions.

A likely New Urbanist buyer, Katz claims, is interested in the entire community package being provided by the developer. Thus, the actual sales effort in New Urbanist communities should follow the model of a resale buyer, whose real estate agent scans many houses in many neighborhoods, rather than the model of a new-home buyer, who negotiates directly with a homebuilder's sales staff. Among other things, Katz suggests, this method might permit New Urbanist builders to lure resale home buyers (who constitute the bulk of the market) to buy in their new development projects.

Comparison of Buyers and Non-Buyers of Homes in Neotraditional Developments (NTD)

Demographic Characteristics	Buyers (% responses)	Non-Buyers (% responses)
married	66	65
aged 26-45	62	67
dual household income	52	52
household income $51,000-110,000	60	46
household income less than $50,000	18	41
no children living at home	73	53
Opinions and Perceptions		
is likely to walk to local retail shops	75	47
is willing to pay more to shop locally rather than drive to a mall	56	32
thinks NTD has better appreciation value than a conventional subdivision	63	42
thinks NTD is overrated	21	47
likes front porches	80	65
likes narrower streets	61	41

Note: Of the 618 buyers surveyed in the communities of Kentlands, Harbortown, West and Seaside, 311 or 50 percent responded. Of 405 qualified prospects surveyed, 159 or 39 percent responded. Both surveys were conducted during 1993.

Source: John Schleimer, NorCal Market Perspectives, Inc. Roseville, CA

KENTLANDS, MARYLAND

A planned 1,600-unit development on 356 acres in Gaithersburg, Maryland, 23 miles outside Washington, D.C., Kentlands has become the leading East Coast example of the New Urbanism. Designed by Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk for developer Joseph Alfandre in 1988, Kentlands includes six different neighborhoods and a large retail center tied together by public spaces (squares, parks, public buildings), yet separated by natural features such as water and woods. The original Kent farmhouse was retained.

The streetscape in Kentlands reflects the Federalist style of many older neighborhoods in the Mid-Atlantic states. Building lots are relatively small and many houses are located close to the street. Housing types vary from single-family houses of varying size to courtyard apartments and townhouses. The developers sought to vary residential streetscapes by awarding scattered lots to builders, rather than having homebuilders construct whole neighborhoods that would look alike, as is the more common practice.

Kentlands, like other New Urban communities, has had financial difficulty. The original developer was unable to deliver the crucial retail component of the project at the expected time, and early home sales were slow compared to nearby developments.

Project Cost and Product Pricing

Throughout the twentieth century, cost and financing issues have sunk more than a few utopian "New Towns" in America. In the 1960s, both Reston and Columbia nearly failed because up-front infrastructure costs were high and sales did not materialize as rapidly as expected. Most of the federally sponsored "new communities" suffered a similar fate during the 1974-75 recession. Columbia's developer, the late James Rouse, told a congressional committee in 1975, "Nobody in the development business ever assumes a down cycle."

In business terms, the genius of the postwar suburb was that it was cheap to build and sell. The Levittowns of America were constructed on inexpensive, flat farmland and built with very few community amenities—often little more than basic roads and a school in addition to the houses. Expectations have changed since then, and the New Urbanist ideal holds within it a very high standard of community amenity—parks, town centers, and infrastructure suitable for both cars and pedestrians. At least some of these amenities must be installed early to give consumers confidence in the future of the neighborhood.

These requirements increase both the up-front cost and the carrying cost to the developer. As with Reston and Columbia, New Urbanist projects are vulnerable to an economic downturn. If houses are not sold at the expected rate, financial disaster could result, as happened with Laguna West. After installing a town center and other community infrastructure at the front end, the project suffered in the real estate recession that hit California in 1991.

Laguna West also shows how sensitive a New Urbanist project is to the well-timed phasing of homes, stores and other community amenities. A conventional suburban tract selling "lot size and views" can deliver on that promise with the construction of one house or one cul-de-sac. But a New Urbanist project selling a sense of community will disappoint unless that community is delivered at the right time. Laguna West's poorly phased release of building lots had the effect of scattering built streets far from one another and far from the town center, making a sense of community hard to discern. All these problems harmed the market potential of a project that has otherwise received dreamboat publicity.

Kentlands suffered from similar problems. Competing in a hotly contested marketplace with smaller-than-average lots, Kentlands failed to attract retail stores to its town center before houses went on the market. This problem understandably led some potential homebuyers to wonder what they were really buying. The Kentlands experience also reveals the pricing problem. Partly because of the development's high cost, single-family houses went on the market at 30 percent more per square foot than comparable houses in nearby neighborhoods. Although Kentlands' condominiums and townhouses are priced competitively and offer a broad range of product types, overall sales continue to lag.

In short, New Urbanists—like their predecessors—have learned some hard lessons about costs and sales success. In particular, the promise of a diversified community, with many different types and prices of houses, retail stores within walking distance and other community amenities, is not enough. Marketing requires a highly sophisticated effort to bring all the components "on line" in the right sequence. As with so many other aspects of the New Urbanism, this marketing effort demands a fundamental shift in the way its proponents operate within the prevailing real estate development industry.

Conclusions: Can the New Urbanism Succeed?

The visual appeal of New Urbanism and the charisma of its outspoken proponents have attracted a flood of publicity and enthusiasm not seen in the fields of urban planning and design in decades. In the next few years, developers and designers across the country will be asked to create New Urbanist projects, and local planners, public officials and residents will be asked to pass judgment on them.

Because the movement is still in its infancy, it is difficult to determine exactly what can make the New Urbanism succeed and what might cause it to fail. Yet, even based on limited experience, it is possible to draw several conclusions about using the New Urbanism in the real world of real estate development and urban planning at the turn of this century.

First, it's important to keep the New Urbanism in perspective. Although it is often advertised as a panacea, it simply cannot solve all urban and suburban problems, even if it is perfectly executed. There is no "magic bullet" that will solve inner-city disinvestment, suburban traffic congestion, regional air pollution, and the political malaise of the average citizen. The New Urbanism is only part of the solution. It addresses primarily the physical arrangement of neighborhoods and communities, not their social, cultural or economic structures. It is based on the assumption that changes in physical design will lead to changes in other areas of community life, but this assumption is still largely untested.

A more constructive approach is to understand that the New Urbanism will probably function most successfully in a broader planning context that supports it. An 80-acre New Urbanist neighborhood in a sea of conventional subdivisions might look different and provide its residents with a particular quality of life, but it is not going to upend a half-century of auto-dependent suburban development.

The emerging consensus among New Urbanists is that neotraditional neighborhood design goals must be reinforced by regional planning and economic policies to reshape the urban and suburban fabric. It makes no sense, for example, to build neotraditional neighborhoods on the metropolitan fringe while ignoring the decline of traditionally designed neighborhoods in the urban core.

A **second** and related point is that the New Urbanism will have a positive effect only if it is linked to a consistent set of policies and programs in all areas of metropolitan development. Taxation policies and transportation subsidies, for example, must be coordinated. If land and gasoline are taxed and subsequently priced at artificially low levels, these policies will only reinforce existing patterns of sprawl and undermine inner-city redevelopment.

Many New Urbanist plans assume that their neighborhoods will be linked to a regional transit system that people find attractive enough to use regularly. Thus, for the New Urbanism to succeed, it must be applied not just to private real estate development but to public investment as well. If neighborhoods are intended to be pedestrian-friendly, so must be the City Hall, schools and other public spaces. If local streets are meant to serve multiple purposes, they must be connected to a larger multi-modal transportation network and public destinations that provide the amenities and choices that New Urbanists envision.

Third, it's important to remember that changes in the urban landscape typically appear slowly and incrementally. Certainly, a large new development project on raw land can dramatically alter an individual area. But the auto-oriented, suburban-style metropolises we see in America today are the result of a half-century or more of growth. Even if local officials decide to pursue the goals of New Urbanism, it would take years or even decades for these ideas to fundamentally change the existing urban/suburban landscape.

Finally, one must not underestimate the power of the New Urbanism as an idea. Perhaps the most refreshing aspect of this movement is simply that, after 50 years of suburban development that emphasized the private realm, the New Urbanism promotes a positive image of a more public daily life. Instead of allowing people to withdraw from their neighbors and their communities, the New Urbanism encourages them to interact. In a world where a "lack of community" is often blamed for many social ills, promoting this vision to a wary public is no small achievement.

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Credits

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