# Planning Matters

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# **Principles of True Urbanism**

by Suzanne H. Crowhurst Lennard and Henry L. Lennard (2004/2006)

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#### Introduction

The purpose of the Making Cities Livable movement is to enhance the well-being of inhabitants of cities and towns, strengthen community, increase civic engagement by reshaping the built environment of our cities, suburbs and towns, and thereby improve social and physical health.

To achieve these goals requires, first and foremost, a well-functioning public realm – meetings, encounters, dialogue among people young and old with a diversity of backgrounds, acquaintances, friends and strangers – that exists in multi-functional public places, squares, and market-places.

To be vibrant these public places must exist within a truly urban fabric, and for this reason the Making Cities Livable movement promotes true urbanism – the time-tested principles of appropriate human scale architecture, mixed-use shop/ houses, and a compact urban fabric of blocks, streets, and squares.

The principles of true urbanism create a cellular "City of Short Distances" where balanced transportation planning making possible commuting via pedestrian networks, bicycle networks, traffic quietened streets and public transportation.

Regional planning for controlled growth, focused economic development, and integrated transportation system, is an essential element of true urbanism.

True urbanism respects each city's unique identity, its "DNA" and considers the city as a work of art. The city's identity is further expressed through its public art. Outdoor cafes and restaurants, farmers markets, and community festivals draw people together and help to create community.

The principles of true urbanism generate cities that are both ecologically

sustainable, emphasizing infill and reconstruction rather than Greenfield development (and thereby reducing oil consumption), and socially sustainable, by promoting the individual's social, mental, and physical well-being and the community's cultural, economic, and social well-being.

A measure of the city's livability is how good it is for children and youth. If a city lacks livability, they are the first to suffer. A city built o true urbanism principles provides the ideal environment for the physical, mental, and social development of children and youth.

#### Public Realm

We agree with Lewis Mumford that contact among diverse inhabitants, and the dialogue that ensues in the city's public places (its streets and squares) is the "ultimate expression of life in the city."

Public places are not owned by special groups, nor dedicated to special purposes; they do not impose restrictions on their use, so long as one person's use does not limit anyone else's. (Feldtkeller).

Contact, encounters, and exchanges of ideas among citizens — these qualities of the public realm are a fundamental requirement for citizens' well-being. (Aristotle). A well-functioning public realm serves multiple important functions.

It builds social capital by cementing social relations through repeated contact among inhabitants in multiple overlapping role relationships.

The public realm at its best is an incomparable teacher of social skills and attitudes; children and youth learn through observation, imitation, and participation how to relate and behave with a diversity of others (young and old, poor and well-to-do, healthy or disabled).

In bringing inhabitants together the public realm contributes to a more democratic

way of life and encourages all to linger, share observations and perspectives, and thereby humanizes all who participate.

We can learn from traditional cities that still have strong communities how the specific design of streets and squares can encourage a rich public life, and how the form of buildings and their relationships to the street can support this.

#### Squares and Marketplaces

If the city is the second most important invention of mankind, as Lewis Mumford maintained, then the multifunctional square is the most important invention of traditional town planning.

The medieval marketplace is still the heart of most European cities and towns, the center of economic, civic, social, and cultural life, providing multiple reasons for people to talk to each other, to work together, to coordinate activities, to prepare for community festivals, and to celebrate together.

The square is a public space, an inclusive space – no one can be kept out – so unlike a shopping mall, which passes for public space in many US cities, the square is fundamentally a democratic space.

As the natural setting for civic engagement it is important that the City Hall is located on the square. Its visibility reminds citizens of the value of civic engagement and keeps representatives in close contact with their constituents.

The square that functions as a market place in the morning, a place for outdoor cafes and restaurants through the afternoon and evening, quiet and peaceful on some days, and on other days the setting for festivals, street musicians, and theatrical performances, a ceremonial civic stage, and a playground for children—this

# True Urbanism (continued from page 1)

is a square that brings all the diverse members of the community together in one place.

The art of creating a genuine mixed use square that fosters community and civic engagement has been lost since the Middle Ages; it involves not only the design of the space but also the design of the built fabric around it, organization of building uses, and pattern of events and celebrations on the square. But, if we value social life, community and democratic decision making then we must rediscover this art. Given the present circumstances this may be the most important challenge facing North American cities today.

#### Appropriate Human Scale Architecture

To create a human scale setting buildings fronting to the street or square should be no higher than five stories, the height at which it is still possible to identify a face at the top window or call down to a friend in the street.

Human scale is expressed by the architecture in windows and doors that are apertures in the wall surface, occurring at each floor level, balconies, and terraces made to the measure of man. (Continuous glass facades and blank walls convey a hostile message).

The human scale of a building is further emphasized by window moldings, carved lintels, arches, columns that accentuate the building apertures. For this reason classical and traditional architecture convey a better sense of human scale than most "twentieth century modern" buildings.

#### Mixed Use Shop/Houses

Modern planning proposed the concept of "single function zoning," separating the varied functions and activities of the city. This principle (except for extreme situations of industrial contamination) has now been shown to have disastrous consequences for social sustainability as well as ecological sustainability.

In a town or city structured on principles of true urbanism, the primary building block is the "shop/house," with shop, workshop, or restaurant at the street level, offices and dwellings above. The close proximity of living, working, socializing, of the private and public realms, is what makes the public realm so hospitable, and the private dwelling so convenient. This fine textured urban fabric makes the traditional city not only socially healthy, but also ecologically sound, eliminating unnecessary travel. It is also an extremely flexible building type: high ceilinged floors facing the square or tree-lined street offer prestigious and high priced accommodations; lower-ceilinged floors with less advantageous views offer affordable housing. But rich or poor, old or young, all have the benefit of being able to live without a car.

In fact the shop/house is truly international. It is found not only in Europe, but in almost every pre-twentieth century city in North and South America, as well as in Asia. The shop, restaurant, or business at street level draws life onto the street, making it possible for people's paths to cross, for conversation to develop, and a business population with some daytime jurisdiction over the square; the apartments above provide, in Jane Jacob's words "eyes on the street," nighttime jurisdiction over the street, and a residential population to frequent the street or square and to form a community.

To function in this way it is essential that the building façade be permeable – with many openings at street level, and with balconies and windows above street levels.

#### Compact Urban Fabric

In a truly urban setting buildings are not freestanding objects in space but are connected to each other forming continuous blocks of buildings that enclose streets and squares. New infill buildings within this context must respect their neighbors and create a civic architectural dialogue, echoing some of the best characteristics of adjacent buildings in choice of materials and colors, window height, and roofline.

These contiguous buildings for blocks perforated by alleyways and usable inner courtyards that allow air and sunlight to enter, and that provide outdoor areas suitable for toddlers' play, children's ball games, outdoor restaurants, gardens, and trees. The inner courtyards create the opportunity for private apartment balconies and roof gardens to open onto quiet oases in the city.

The narrow alleys and pedestrian walkways create pedestrian networks through the town. These alleys must be frequented to be safe, so buildings either side must be human scale with small shops or restaurants opening onto patios.

#### The Cellular "City of Short Distance"

To reduce distances traveled everyday and to make it possible for people to walk or bike to work, shops, and school, the city must have a cellular structure: the town center and each neighborhood district must contain diverse work opportunities, shopping, housing, and all necessary infrastructure – schools, medical services, etc., within a short radius. This goal is called in Europe, the "City of Short Distances."

There are social and health benefits as well as ecological advantages to this commuting by foot through one's neighborhood permits people to begin to recognize strangers as "familiars", makes possible greetings between acquaintances, a pause for conversation among friends, and play among children under the eye of adults – all micro-social events that help to build community. Commuting by automobile has the opposite effect, destroying the social fabric.

Commuting by foot or bike is obviously far healthier than going by car – a fact that has recently been documented by careful research.

Lewis Mumford called for us to plan cities with a cellular structure of neighborhood districts, where the neighborhood is a microcosm of the multifunctional historic core. The traditional "democratic" European city shaped around a central square proved to be functional and sustainable for two thousand years. Neighborhood growth should also be a multifunctional around a central neighborhood square. This traditional way of building cities – true urbanism – was only destroyed by "modernist" planning principles and an oilbased economy after World War Two.

#### **Balanced Transportation Planning**

In a town or city structured on principles of true urbanism, the transportation planner sees more clearly that her job is not about movement of vehicles, but about people and accessibility. She considers all the members of the population - children and older people, the handicapped, poor and well-to-do; the varied trips that they need to make - to school, work, shopping, the library or theater; and makes these trips as pleasant, economical, safe, comfortable, simple, and autonomous as possible. (This is an insight that has been guiding the majority of transportation planners in Germany, the Netherlands, etc. for 20 years).

The emphasis on the trips people make instead of movement of vehicles has led European planners to practice "balanced transportation planning;" that means that, since in the past there has been an

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overemphasis on movement of vehicles, planning for the "softer" and more ecological modes of transportation must now receive priority – that is, trips made by foot, by bicycle and by public transportation. And the trips made by children must be considered as seriously as those made by working adults.

#### Pedestrian Networks

Hundreds of European cities now have closed central areas around their main square to traffic, creating pedestrian zones, and these traffic free zones are gradually being extended by traffic-free or traffic tamed streets out into surrounding neighborhoods, creating a continuous network of pedestrian routes throughout the city. The leading transportation planners realized that a traffic free square or pedestrian island is not enough, if the goal is to make the city accessible by foot, especially for children and the elderly.

Where pedestrians and vehicles cross on these networks it is the pedestrian who is given priority – for example by raised "table crossings" at the height of the sidewalk. (Pedestrian bridges and underpasses that give priority to vehicular movement are unsatisfactory for pedestrians).

Paving design is also important in pedestrian areas; cars require only asphalt, but the pedestrian appreciates a paving that is beautiful, that has texture and design, and that identifies the street and locations on the street.

Pedestrian networks are, of course, accessible for vehicles, but restrictions exist: emergency vehicles have access when necessary; delivery vehicles are permitted during selected times of the day; some pedestrian streets permit buses; taxis and tourists are usually permitted.

#### **Bicycle Networks**

The bicycle is more sociable – as well as ecological form of transportation and must be encouraged. Some European cities, such as Erlangen or Freiburg in Germany have already created a continuous citywide network of dedicated bicycle lanes so that it is possible to bicycle from residential neighborhoods into the heart of the city, or out into the surrounding countryside without having to fight for space with motorized vehicles.

#### **Traffic Quietened Streets**

European cities pioneered in techniques to reduce the volume and speed of vehicular traffic. Their methods include the

Wohnstrasse ("living street"), where pedestrians, including children have equal rights to use the full width of the street as do vehicles. Vehicles must proceed at walking speed. They cannot use the street for through traffic, or park there if they do not live there or deliver there.

By now most large and small streets in European cities have been redesigned to "calm" traffic and reduce traffic volume. Those techniques include "necking," jogging traffic lanes, "roundabouts" or "circles," repaving and raising crosswalks, reducing the number of traffic lanes and their width, and using cobble stones to pave traffic lanes.

Another technique to reduce automobile use is to make access more difficult by auto than by other modes. This is done by closing through streets, giving priority to public transportation, permitting bikes in the pedestrian zones, etc.

#### **Public Transportation**

Strategies to reduce the use of the automobile can only work if a better alternative exists. To compete with the private automobile, public transportation has to be more convenient, faster, less expensive, and as comfortable as the car – and many European cities have achieved this, in part because they have insisted on maintaining the traditional compact, mixed use urban fabric.

The network of routes is very extensive, minimizing the walking distance to a stop; the frequency of service is every 7 - 10minutes; buses and trains are designed to be light, comfortable and easy to step into; and the fact that the public transportation travels through the center of the city (which is closed to cars) mean that access to destination points is better than by car. In addition, the funds that used to support infrastructure for cars have been redirected to improve and subsidize public transportation.

Of course, a public transit system cannot work without an appropriately compact built urban fabric. The wisest transportation planners now say that the best transportation system is the one that requires the least transportation because people can walk or bike.

#### **Regional Planning**

The goal of regional planning for true urbanism must be to strengthen the social, cultural, and economic vitality of existing towns and urban areas, to protect the ecological balance of the region, and to minimize wasteful use of non-renewable energy.

Regional planning for true urbanism requires cities and small towns within an extended area to work together to focus new development within existing urban boundaries; to establish guidelines for the location of new housing close to jobs, schools, shopping, and services; to prevent shopping malls and big box retail locating outside city limits where they would destroy the city's economy and generate superfluous automobile traffic.

#### The DNA of the City

Many European cities have developed their unique identity over hundreds of years, building on their best loved features. We have proposed the metaphor that for the city, as for every living thing, we can determine a genetic code, or DNA structure.<sup>1</sup>

The DNA is expressed in those architectural and spatial characteristics best loved by the city's inhabitants. These may consist of certain building materials and colors, a typical arrangement of scale and architectural forms, building lot size, roof lines, scale of public and semi-public spaces.

In order to fit into the context, new buildings have respected this "genetic code," reflecting at least some existing patterns, or interpreting them in a contemporary idiom.

The DNA is codified in design guidelines, an idea invented in Siena in 1309. These early design guidelines specified, for example, that Piazza il Campo should be paved in brick, and the surrounding palaces should have brick facades; they defined the scale of buildings, and size and proportion of windows; and they made the point that the façade of every building in the city should be considered as a "gift" to the city as a whole.

When inhabitants themselves are able to recognize what fits and what does not fit, what violates the unique character of the city, and what is appropriate or not appropriate, there is general consensus that the British playwright Peter Shaffer called the "communal eye."

#### The City as a Work of Art

For hundreds of years the city was considered a work of art. The pleasure that inhabitants and visitors experience in a city that is beautiful is translated in the body

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into "endorphins" that increase mental and physical well-being.

A beautiful city is a city that is aesthetic as a whole, in the relationship of buildings to one another, and in the design of individual buildings and places.

The image of the city as a whole becomes difficult to grasp is we permit our cities to sprawl into mega-cities. We need smaller, more cellular cities with clear green boundaries, centers and focal points. The view, or the idea of the city as a whole – or the neighborhood as a whole – should provide a sense of pleasure.

To create a beautiful composition of buildings that complement each other around a shared public place used to be a goal of city making. You can see it expressed par excellence in Venice's Piazza San Marco. While these buildings were constructed over a span of 700 years, and while each individual building embodies a profoundly different set of values, their juxtaposition celebrates the contribution of each to the whole.

The idea that an individual building should be composed of diverse elements beautifully articulated was an obvious goal in previous centuries.

#### **Public Art**

Meaningful, accessible and playful public art plays a role in humanizing the city and expressing its identity by representing traditional industry and crafts, marking historic locations, remembering popular and famous citizens, and portraying local myths and legends.

Works of art should be anchors in the urban realm, drawing people together, offering pleasure, information, and a topic for conversation among strangers.

#### **Outdoor Cafes & Restaurants**

Outdoor cafes and restaurants are extremely valuable in encouraging people to spend more time in public spaces, facilitating meetings and extended conversations in the public realm, even into the night.

These also require traffic free public places where children can safely play while parents and grandparents sit at the café, where conversation around the table is not drowned out by the sound of traffic.

#### Farmers Market

The farmers market is important not simply because it brings fresh produce into the city

and provides an incomparable aesthetic experience: in fact, the farmers' market is one of the most powerful generators of social and economic life and must be given a place on the main square.

The farmers are well skilled in interaction and act like "hosts" in the public space; they know their regular customers and make people feel recognized and valued.

#### **Community Festivals**

True community festivals instill in the individual a sense of joy and well-being. They increase the body's production of endorphins and promote a shared sense of identity and pride in community.

Community festivals are both the expression of a sense of community and a mechanism for the development of community. They bring together the diverse population, people of different ages, social and economic groups, ethnic backgrounds, and enable them to work together to achieve a common goal – the celebration of the community as a whole.

The planning and practice, the discussion of themes, making of costumes, the creation of beautiful works of art and music, and especially eating and drinking together in the public space at festivals binds the community together.

To achieve its goal of bringing the community together the festival needs to take place on a main square that, at least during the festival is traffic free.

#### Children & Young People

If we want to make our cities healthy and livable for all, then we must first make them livable for children. If our cities are unhealthy or lack livability, children are the first to suffer. Every aspect of the city's urban design, built fabric, organization of streets, or pattern of transportation impacts on children. It was to explain these issues that we wrote our recent book, "The Forgotten Child."<sup>2</sup>

Robbed of the natural exercise of walking or biking to school and after-school activities, by the sprawling auto-dependent character of the suburbs child obesity has become a national disgrace.

Robbed of the impromptu social interaction in community life that can accompany autonomous walking and biking to school in a "city of short distances" children are failing to develop a sense that they are included in their community. For excitement some young people turn to the most pathogenic environment of all – the world of violent video games, and in a number of cases, act them out in their schools with deadly consequences. We cannot afford to wait any longer to restructure our cities and sprawling suburbs.

An important emphasis of the International Making Cities Livable effort is to identify how the design of the physical environment can support inclusion of children in the public social realm, and how this can educate them to become valued community members and citizens.

Good public spaces facilitate the social development of children: they learn how to talk to adults other than their parents and teachers. In good public spaces the conversations among varied adults present a model for children to emulate.

Children grow up assuming that they are the kind of person that their physical environment tells them they are. They see their environment as a portrait of themselves; an ugly, brutal environment has a deadening effect, seeming to justify brutal and violent reactions.

We must make cities that are worthy of a child's affection, in which they can feel at home, and find "their special places"; it should be possible for children to get to know their city inside out, to "hold their city in the palm of their hand". They are, after all, the ones who will inherit the city, and become responsible for its future.

#### **References:**

<sup>1</sup>Suzanne H. Crowhurst Lennard & Henry L. Lennard. Livable Cities Observed. A Source Book of Images and Ideas for City Officials, Architects, Planners. Gondolier Press, 1995.

<sup>2</sup>Henry L. Lennard, Suzanne H. Crowhurst Lennard, The Forgotten Child. Cities for the Well-Being of Children. Gondolier Press, 1995.

For more information on True Urbanism, visit ICML's website at www.livablecities.org

1	January— June 30, 2006								
	City of Bardstown		Nelson County			Fotal			
-	Permits	Est. Cost (\$)	Permits	Est. Cost (\$)	Permits	Est. Cost (\$)			
Agricultural Structure Addition	0	\$0	3	\$43,150	3	\$43,150			
Agricultural Structures	0	\$0	36	\$808,515	36	\$808,515			
Agricultural Subtotal	0	\$0	39	\$851,665	39	\$851,665			
Accessory Additions	0	\$0	1	\$350	1	\$350			
Accessory Structures	59	\$230,034	135	\$834,337	194	\$1,064,371			
Demolitions	2	\$0	1	\$0	3	\$0			
Duplexes (10 units)	2	\$140,000	3	\$342,000	5	\$482,000			
Duplex Alteration	0	\$0	1	\$5,000	1	\$5,000			
Manufactured Homes, Double-wide	0	\$0	9	\$564,615	9	\$564,615			
Manufactured Homes, Soude-wide	0	\$0	12	\$128,100	12	\$128,100			
Modular Homes	0	\$0	4	\$343,995	4	\$343,995			
Multi-Family Structures (17 units)	4	\$455,000	2	\$120,000	6	\$575,000			
Multi-Family Alterations/Remodeling	4 0	\$400,000 \$0	0	\$120,000 \$0	0	\$373,000			
Single-Family Additions	15	\$0 \$220,364	37	\$0 \$656,478	52	<del>پ</del> و \$876,842			
Single-Family Dwellings	25	\$3,400,125	110	\$15,395,318	135	\$18,795,443			
Single-Family Alteration/Remodeling	3	\$3,400,125	4	\$15,395,318	7	\$69,600			
	4		4 11		15				
Townhouses/Condominiums (36 units)		\$240,000		\$3,020,000		\$3,260,000			
Residential Subtotal	114	\$4,728,523	330	\$21,436,793	444	\$26,165,316			
Commercial Accessory Structures	2	\$8,500	4	\$6,000	6	\$14,500			
Commercial Additions	1	\$15,000	2	\$43,301	3	\$58,301			
Commercial Alteration/Remodeling	8	\$254,000	1	\$35,000	9	\$289,000			
Commercial Demolitions	1	\$0	0	\$0	1	\$0			
Commercial Structures	14	\$7,816,576	2	\$304,300	16	\$8,120,876			
Commercial Tenant Fit-Ups	19	\$2,017,094	2	\$67,160	21	\$2,084,254			
Commercial Subtotal	45	\$10,111,170	11	\$455,761	56	\$10,566,931			
Industrial Accessory Structures	0	\$0	0	\$0	0	\$0			
Industrial Additions	3	\$2,096,000	2	\$1,307,872	5	\$3,403,872			
Industrial Alterations/Remodeling	0	\$0	1	\$2,000	1	\$2,000			
Industrial Structures	2	\$9,978,390	0	\$0	2	\$9,978,390			
Industrial Subtotal	5	\$12,074,390	3	\$1,309,872	8	\$13,384.262			
Cell Tower	0	\$0	1	\$75,000	1	\$75,000			
Cell Tower Accessory Structure	0	\$0	3	\$63,700	3	\$63,700			
Public Accessory Structures	0	\$0 \$0	0	\$0	0	\$0			
Public Structures	1	\$324,000	2	\$798,000	3	\$1,122,000			
Public Addition	0	\$0	1	\$90,000	1	\$90,000			
Public Demolitions	1	\$0	0	¢00,000 0	1	¢30,000 \$0			
Public Alterations/Remodeling	1	\$2,000,000	0	\$0	1	\$2,000,000			
Public Subtotal	3	\$2,000,000 \$2,324,000	7	\$1,026,700	10	\$2,000,000 \$3,350,700			
Total Permits Issued	167	\$29,238,083	390	\$25,080,791	557	\$54,318,874			

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# Joint City-County Planning Commission of Nelson County

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Zoning Compliance Permit Comparison January 1 —June 30, 2005 & 2006								
Туре	Jan-June 2005 # Permits (# Units)	Jan-June 2005 Construction Cost	Jan-June 2006 # Permits (# Units)	Jan-June 2006 Construction Cost				
Single-family dwellings	249 (249)	\$30,504,058	135 (135)	\$18,795,443				
Duplexes	4 (8)	\$457,000	5 (10)	\$482,000				
Multi-family dwellings (3+ units)	0	\$0	6 (17)	\$575,000				
Townhouses/condominiums	4 (15)	\$1,275,000	15 (36)	\$3,260,000				
Commercial structures	16	\$8,290,463	16	\$8,120,876				
Industrial structures	2	\$1,000,000	2	\$9,978,390				
Public structures	1	\$17,600	3	\$1,122,000				
Total	584	\$49,213,994	557	\$54,318,874				

Total Dwelling Units by Area January—March 2006								
Area	#	%	Area	#	%			
Samuels Hamlet (3)	1	0.4%	Cox's Creek Suburban (4)	1	0.4%			
Boston NSA (2)	11	4.9%	KY 245 Suburban (3)	4	1.9%			
New Haven NSA (7)	4	1.9%	Woodlawn Suburban (6)	41	18.4%			
Bloomfield Rural (5)	18	8.1%	Bloomfield Town (5)	10	4.5%			
Boston Rural (2)	1	0.4%	New Haven Town (7)	1	0.4%			
Botland Hamlet (6)	1	0.4%	New Haven Suburban (7)	1	0.4%			
Cox's Creek Rural (4)	6	2.7%	Urban Industrial Center (1)	4	1.9%			
New Haven Rural (7)	9	4.0%	Outer Urban (1)	47	21.1%			
Woodlawn Rural (6)	6	2.7%	Traditional Urban (1)	30	13.5%			
Bloomfield Suburban (5)	13	5.8%	Deatsville Village (3)	11	4.9%			
Boston Suburban (2)	2	0.9%	New Hope Village (7)	1	0.4%			