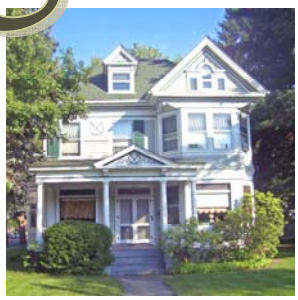
Planning Ulster



Ulster County Planning Board 244 Fair Street, Kingston NY 12401

Traditional Neighborhood Design
Lessons and Best Practices

Planning Guide
2/2010

The Ulster County Planning Board (UCPB) has responsibilities for review of local land use regulations under the General Municipal Law of New York State. The UCPB also provides technical assistance to local governments and is involved in construction projects initiated by Ulster County. The following was developed to provide guidance to the County Planning Board in exercising its responsibilities in these areas and to aid communities in their approach to the development of local land use tools and conducting project reviews. This Planning Guide is consistent with UCPB policies regarding Greenway community design principles.

Time-Tested Principles of Good Design

Introduction

Across the country, many communities are reversing the trend of suburban sprawl and the decline of Main Streets by changing their approach to local planning and zoning.

Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND)

TND is a nationally recognized practice that is understood in the planning, design and development fields to have the time-tested characteristics of older communities that maintain a pedestrian scale and orientation.

The TND approach has been has been used to aid in the design of infill development, newer extensions of communities and even wholly new areas. Devised by the architecture and urban design firm of Duany & Plater-Zyberk ("DPZ"), the TND concept and its implementation regulations require

adherence to certain urban design conventions and is set up so that the form of development is based on the neighborhood, rather than isolated homes.

The popularity of TNDs as a preferred form of development is increasing rapidly. In a major shift of public taste, according to studies by Smart Growth America and the Urban Land Institute, more homebuyers would prefer to live in traditionally-designed, "walkable" communities and are willing to pay more for homes in these neighborhoods (see "Walkability Pays" below).

Atlantic Station in Atlanta, Georgia is one of the most successful examples of Traditional Neighborhood design in the country

Reversing the Isolation of Zoning

Zoning codes often hinder the development of traditional, walkable neighborhoods that contain a mix of retail, office, and residential uses as zoning typically provides segregation of land uses. Planning practitioners, working with architects and developers, have created zoning codes that provide flexibility to achieve a desired outcome and have established overlay districts with development requirements that encourage the use of TND principles for development within them. (See "Smart Code Central" at www.smartcodecentral.com and "Form-Based Codes Get Results" on page 6).

TNDs are designed to recapture many of the traditional elements of town planning. They begin with a compact center with mixed uses and are based on a hierarchical design that decreases density as it moves away from the center. The hierarchy also encourages various building styles and sizes with a network of streets and that

Walkability Pays

A decade ago, Mark J. Eppli and Charles C. Tu, in *Valuing the New Urbanism*. (Urban Land Institute, 1999) showed that properties in Kentlands were shown to be selling for $30,000 to $40,000 more, on average, than homes in the surrounding suburbs. Condos in Atlantic Station (see image above), a TND "New Urbanism" development in Atlanta sold out in record time even for that brisk real estate market. According to the recent publication "How Walkability Raises Home Values in U.S. Cities" by economist Joe Cortright. Examining data from 98,000 home sales in 15 metropolitan area, walkability raises home values by $4,000 to $34,000. (To download: http://www.americantrails.org/resources/devel/Economic-value-walking-homes.html

This street is welcoming for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit; plentiful street trees help to 'green' it.

supports "transit-oriented development" and encourages pedestrian activity and interaction. Another name for this hierarchical zoning and urban design is called "Transect zoning," a system that replaces conventional separated-use zoning systems that have encouraged a car-dependent culture and land-consuming sprawl. In contrast with the conventional suburban approach of placing houses away from the street, TND homes are pulled forward toward narrower, tree-lined streets. The approach sets up hierarchy of streets and buildings to create a sense of place: utilizing existing features on the site, relating to the surrounding context, defining the center, the public spaces, and the neighborhood edge, and setting the buildings in relation to one another so as to create a human scale.

TND is pedestrian-oriented, so that all aspects of the design are meant to facilitate walking whenever possible. The design of streets, sidewalks, and buildings is not dictated by convenience for automobiles; rather, it is at a human scale. Therefore, TND's have smaller street widths, smaller turning radii at street corners, crosswalks, parking reductions, frequent and regularly spaced street trees, narrow lots, consistently placed building facades close to the sidewalk, mixed uses, and front porches. Garages are usually access by alleyways or placed at the side or rear of lots. Each has a function creating opportunities for people to interact with their neighbors and for the street and public spaces to foster a sense of vitality.

Guidance #1: Hierarchy and Street Design

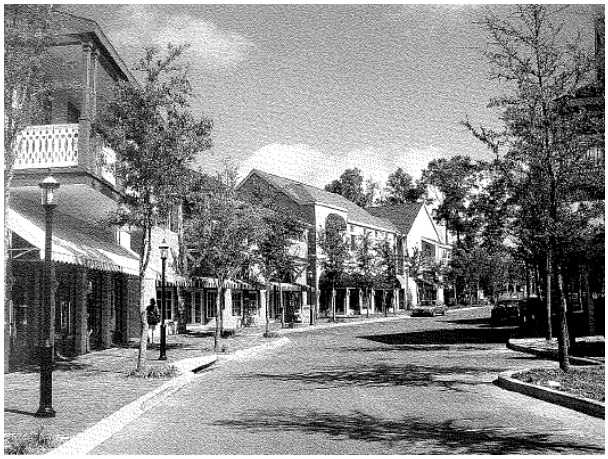
Like traditional communities, TNDs are organized in a hierarchical fashion. The "Main Street" is typically a mixed-use area with apartments or offices above, but the

Ask for Complete Streets

While streets need to move cars, they also should give people the choice of walking, biking and using public transit. Most streets today are built only with cars in mind, so they're not always safe, comfortable and pleasant for people outside their vehicles. Across the country communities increasingly are demanding "Complete Streets". With only a few, inexpensive tweaks to road projects, we can save lives and make our towns and cities far more livable. For more on this, see: www.CompleteStreets.org

Source: David Goldberg, Choosing Our Community's Future: *A Guide to Getting the Most Out of New Development*. Smart Growth America (2005)

design is flexible enough to be adapted as market conditions determine the need for more or less commercial space. The arrangement of buildings around the central spaces has "build-to" lines rather than variable or minimum setbacks so as to maintain a consistency in the street wall and a "room-like" feel of the outdoor public spaces. Generally speaking, hierarchical design also calls for a gradual stepping down in density toward the neighborhood edge and along with it a reduction in building massing. The overall effect is a dense mixed use core surrounded by a residential space at the edges. Amenities, streets, and building types, massing reinforce this pattern.



These buildings "hug" the street, creating a welcoming outdoor space.

As part of the hierarchical TND street and block layout, buildings also typically follow a pattern of decreasing density moving away from the center. The triangular and circular shapes created by the central boulevards, main streets and public spaces are typically matched by the building placement following the property line as a means of creating the "outdoor room."

Not only does this create visual interest in the streetscape, public spaces and building forms, it also maintains the pedestrian orientation by maintaining visual interest, calming traffic, and creating an enclosure that feels safe and welcoming.

Design of Streets, Sidewalks and Blocks:

In a TND, streets, sidewalks and buildings are highly integrated. The street network of TNDs is typically hierarchical, with a "Boulevard," and "Main Street" and squares, secondary and residential streets, lanes, and alleys. Pedestrian orientation remains throughout the development to facilitate walking and traffic calming even along higher volume roads. The hierarchy is reinforced by the compatibility of public spaces and buildings within that hierarchy. Compatible buildings face one another, even if they vary in form. Sidewalks near the core, public

The axis, architectural features, and varied rooflines and of this street in Seaside, Florida create a place that feels unique and has set a high standard for TND to follow.

spaces, and retail are wider to accommodate more people strolling and interacting, without being so wide as to isolate them.

Traffic Calming:

The design of streets creates an urban corridor with distinct edge definition includes regularly spaced trees, safe and convenient crossing opportunities, distinctly surfaced crosswalks, parking areas and swales, bump-outs, and a number of other visual and physical cues to calm traffic.

Open Spaces:

The public open spaces within a TND are a mix of small intimate spaces with more freely flowing or highly structured large greens. These are designed as an extension of the neighborhood and in the core often serve as the front porch for public

Woodstock's Village Green (below).

interactions. Where present natural open spaces soften edges and lead residents and visitors both visually and physically to linger.

Guidance #2: Building Form and Placement

The relationship of buildings to the street is so important that special care is taken to avoid the awkward and unused transitional spaces that result from placing rectangular shapes on curvilinear streets or unusually shaped lots. Buildings follow the street line reinforcing its form and altering shape and style to conform. The result is some of the most interesting urban and village spaces with perimeter buildings that surround intersections creating public spaces behind them, the use of gateway and signature buildings that are placed at the critical entryways to punctuate the sense of place, and the breaking up of multifamily structures into one and two family units that hug the street line. Streets and structures work together framing the vista at the end of a street axis, which might be terminated with a significant natural or architectural feature.

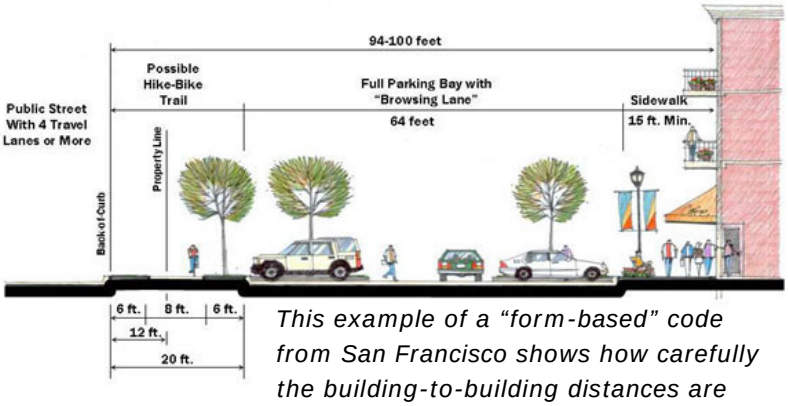
Setbacks:

Buildings and their layout in relation to the street is also critical in creating the room-

The Value of Parks

Parks and open space are essential to quality of life and are a key aspect in traditional neighborhood design. In the hierarchy of neighborhoods, they are essential, including small squares, as well as trails and "greenways" that act to define the edges of the community. They have also proven to increase property values significantly. For more about this, see www.tpl.org/content_documents/ccpe_econvalueparks_rpt.pdf

like feel of outdoor spaces. Rather than providing minimum and maximum setbacks, TNDs usually have "build to" lines to avoid the irregularity that could occur. In addition, TNDs maintain uniform placement of facades, rather than saw tooth or alternating setback patterns, as these latter types tend to isolate neighbors from one another.



This example of a "form-based" code from San Francisco shows how carefully the building-to-building distances are maintained to create a quality place.

Building-to-Building Distance:

The distances between buildings across the street from one another should help foster the feeling of "outdoor rooms," such as those illustrated in the illustration above. In the a central residential area, the building-to-building distance is typically between 70 but and 90 feet, and in the storefront areas the building-to-building distance is typically at least 50 feet but no more than 70 feet, except along boulevards and when buildings face onto greens or public squares. In retail areas, unless there is a specific type of public plaza intended in front of retail spaces for outdoor seating (e.g., cafes, public seating), buildings with retail are built to the property line and uniformly placed to facilitate a dialogue

Form-Based Codes Get Results

According to an article in the January 2005 issue of Builder magazine, developers in Arlington, VA now waltz through the zoning approval process within 55 days, thanks to new "form-based" codes that specify the shape and composition of buildings and where they can be placed on property along major thoroughfare Columbia Pike… developers have been attracted by the codes' predictability which makes it easier to show the community that their plans are in compliance. It's an entirely different way of zoning. After 40 years of no development, there is now hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of construction underway on Columbia Pike.

Source: Ped Shed—A Blog about Walkable Urban Design and Sustainable Placemaking: http://pedshed.net. For more about Form-Based Codes, visit: www.formbasedcodes.org

Columbia Pike existing conditions (upper photo) *and envisioned development (lower photo) using Form-based Code. Image by Urban Advantage.*

with the passers-by. Likewise, town homes with front stoops may have a small setback, but the stoop typically meets the sidewalk at the property line.

Guidance #3: Building Types

TNDs offer a variety of building types and architectural styles. They insure that buildings grouped together vary roof lines and architectural treatments of the façade in a meaningful way. As an example where provided, gables and dormers are required to be functional. Variety is also evident in residential neighborhoods away from the core. Intersections here also become focal points and building masses are differentiated between streets and along curves.

Guidance #4: Building Design Elements

Front Porches:

Many TND's encourage front porches in a large percentage of homes to recreate the social interaction that has disappeared from most of our current subdivisions. Simply moving the houses closer to the street and providing tree-lined sidewalks do not guarantee pedestrian interaction. However, locating porches close to the sidewalks alls residents to converse with neighbors as they pass by. Contrary to most conventional subdivisions, traditional neighborhoods encourage residents to become acquainted with their neighbors.

The Chichester House on Fair Street shows the importance of the front porch in Kingston's traditional architecture.

Windows:

Window spacing, articulation, proportion, and materials are all part of a TND and support the texture, form and rhythm of buildings. Most TNDs articulate size and placement and note the materials used. Window size and proportion for storefront design is critical. They create a visual rhythm of structural openings and provide views of the interior. Retail window sizes are spelled out clearly, as well as materials, awning regulations, and the use of transom windows (strongly encouraged).

Roof Color and material

Roof styles are also part of a TND Plan with a general provision for variety. Guidelines usually preclude the ridge lines from being uniform in direction and shape. Typical roof materials include slate (natural or manmade), shingle (wood or asphalt composition), and metal formed to resemble "standing seams." Roof color is specified within the range of colors found on buildings shown in the design guidelines.

"Cooltowns": Everything Old is New Again

Young professionals, families and empty nesters are flocking back to downtowns and "walkable" traditional neighborhoods. These kinds of communities have earned the moniker of "Cooltowns" because they are hip, sustainable, and attract professionals in the "creative class" (www.cooltownstudios.com). Saugerties earned that title in a recent tourism publication. *Growing Cooler: The Evidence on Urban Development and Climate Change*, A new book by the Urban Land Institute, shows that the majority of future housing demand lies in smaller homes and lots, townhouses, and condominiums in neighborhoods where jobs and activities are close at hand. To find this book and find out more, visit Urban Land Institute at www.uli.org and Smart Growth America at www.smartgrowthamerica.org or

Partition Street, Saugerties

Useful Links on Placemaking and Neighborhood Design

American Planning Association: www.planning.org

Center for Applied Transect Studies: www.transect.org

Congress for the New Urbanism: www.cnu.org

Form-Based Codes Institute: www.formbasedcodes.org

National Trust for Historic Preservation: www.preservationationnation.org

National Complete Streets Coalition: www.completestreets.org

Smart Code Central: www.smartcodecentral.com

Smart Growth America: www.smartgrowthamerica.org

The Town Paper: http: www.tndtownpaper.com/neighborhoods.htm

Trust for Public Land: www.tpl.org

Urban Land Institute: www.uli.org

The Walkable and Livable Communities Institute: www.walklive.org

Main Street Rosendale, Watercolor by resident artists Staats Fasolt

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