

The Neighborhood Sociable.

PLANNING AND DESIGNING NEIGHBORHOODS TO CREATE SOCIAL CAPITAL.

Complete neighborhoods, the ones with homes, apartments, parks, school and shops, give us a sense of belonging, a sense of continuity, a sense of ownership, a sense of responsibility for the “the greater good.” A complete, livable neighborhood has a comfortable and equitable balance of the physical, economic and social aspects of life.

The challenge for planners of the physical realm is to use our planning and design skills to enhance the sociability and civility of our cities. Anonymity, isolation and lethargy are the enemies. Places and spaces for civil and social discourse is the response. To paraphrase Sir Winston Churchill, we define our places, and then they define us.

The purpose of this chapter is to present ideas that expand the thinking about neighborhoods; to anticipate daily needs of residents as they use their private and public spaces for formal and informal social and economic engagement.

Neighborhoods thrive in proximity to libraries, hospitals, churches and schools. These publicly available places are important assets for residents to meet and discuss events of the day, neighborhood issues and opportunities.

Neighborhood civility and sociability are the prizes. Neighborhood associations and individual residents are important agents to nurture their neighborhood social activities.

BEAUTY IS AN ESSENTIAL SOCIAL ASSET.

Never underestimate the power of a lovingly cared for neighborhood yard, a beautiful setting, a sunset bench or a waterfront park to inspire the best in people. Homes, apartments, yards, gardens and streets with trees and flowers flourish. Funding for maintenance and facilities using special districts for landscape maintenance and street lights contribute to protecting neighborhood values.



“NEIGHBORHOODS OF PLACE”.

Places of residence have historically dominated our lives. Neighborhoods, apartment buildings, small towns and villages provided the venue for most of our non-working interests. People once focused on interests closer to home, be they their church, club, work, sport, park or pub. Neighborhoods once centered our lives.

“NEIGHBORHOODS OF INTEREST”.

In contemporary society, three things are happening. First, people have separated their place of residence from their places of work. While the trend is toward re-establishing the home-work connection, life in the early 21st century is still dominated by the separation of work and home. Commuting and separation dissipate our neighborhood-building energies.

The second trend is the single person household. In 2010, only 30% of households had children at home; 70% of households were single persons or couples without children. Both trends work against investing in neighborhoods.

Thirdly, people are participating in activities outside the neighborhood. Sporting and cultural events are increasingly found at recreation and cultural centers located beyond walking and biking distance of most residents.

These trends are evolving in the direction of livability. More people work at or near home, more individuals are taking an interest in their residential neighborhood and more schools, parks and shops are being located within or near residential dwellings.

However, neighborhood planners and designers still need to seek the prize of aligning people’s places of residence and interests.



History creates conversation.



Neighborhood schools are great social places.



Always find a place for a farmers’ market.

ALIGNING “NEIGHBORHOODS OF PLACE” AND “NEIGHBORHOODS OF INTEREST”.

**A Model Action Plan to
Align “Neighborhoods of Place” and “Neighborhoods of Interest”.**

1. **Engage stakeholders at the start** of the neighborhood planning and design process for new neighborhoods, established neighborhoods and those being re-developed to determine areas of interest.
2. **Support city neighborhood planning programs that build multi-disciplinary teams with the full range of expertise** in the physical, social science and economic aspects of neighborhood planning, design, operations and maintenance to assure that physical design meets economic and social needs.
3. **Communicate early and often**, as if the success of the neighborhood depended on it. Establish reliable systems of personal, communal and electronic approaches to perpetuate the two-way conversation.
4. **Articulate and defend the neighborhood’s vision** conjured up by the residents, business owners and others with a stake in the neighborhood’s success. Meld “place” with “interest” by employing:
 - a. **Diversity in all things:** Diversify the general population, the housing stock, the mix of uses, the multiplicity of travel modes and the variety of natural habitat for plants and animals.
 - b. **Neighborhood amenities:** Provide open spaces, parks, cultural venues, educational places and public markets to accommodate a multiplicity of micro-events that promote sociability.
 - c. **Transparent and participatory neighborhood association governance:** Engage citizens in activities and responsibilities to develop mutual aspirations, funding sources and communication systems.
 - d. **Beauty:** Demand beautiful places; they are more sociable and inspirational; they are more worthy of defense. Beauty is a powerful neighborhood-building tool.
5. **Construct funding and financial systems**, from the outset, that are reliable for sources for civic infrastructure and its perpetuation. This is foundational to avoid destructive disputes over money.
6. **Get social outcomes from physical improvements** and facilities; design places, spaces, buildings, neighborhoods, infrastructure and amenities that accommodate, encourage and enable positive social and economic outcomes. Remember, physical amenities are just vessels for the activities and programs that engage people...all people, today and tomorrow. These outcomes don’t just happen; they must be caused, sustained and used.
7. **Be a “serious neighborhood”.** A “serious” neighborhood is a neighborhood with people who are trying to build a nice place to live for themselves, their families, their neighbors and their descendants.
 - a. Find, study, appreciate, and emulate other “Serious Neighborhoods”,
 - b. Conversely, reject “neighborhoods of opportunity” where people view their homes and businesses as short-term real estate investments, places that tolerate all take and no give, places where social capital is being diminished rather than accumulated.
 - c. Take the work seriously, for it is serious work.
8. **Make beauty and fun basic features of the city and its neighborhoods.**

Source: wck | planning

PHYSICAL AMENITIES THAT BUILD SOCIAL CAPITAL.

Amenities Matter. Successful small cities, towns and new neighborhoods find ways to share the times of their lives. Neighborhood theaters, high school football, garden clubs, churches, post offices, pancake breakfasts, farmers’ markets and town picnics create the opportunity for people and families to commune, to create and to share stories, to grow together.

Neighborhood leaders, private and public, in established and new towns, use physical facilities, properly funded, to support events and activities that promote neighborhood socialization and economic development.

A Neighborhood Transportation Center is a terrific case of a physical facility that serves to build social capital. Neighborhood centers have bus stops, ride-sharing and bike-share facilities. All bike/pedways converge at this center.



Life-long Learning Venues located at libraries, neighborhood schools, religious buildings or civic offices are increasingly in demand as the pace of human knowledge grows, as jobs become more demanding and as people have more leisure time to devote to learning. Places with occasional or regular sessions are useful.

Outdoor spaces such as parks, patios, porches, plazas and gardens are often offered by private and public organizations for one-time use or periodic use for health and education classes, club meetings and neighborhood events.



A Public Garden centers a town and becomes a meeting place and source of pride, Lakeland FL.



The Library Fountain invites public play.

GOVERNANCE: PRIVATE GOVERNMENTS AND NEIGHBORHOOD SOCIABILITY.

As new towns are planned and existing cities are rejuvenated, our social system requires governance. Many different systems of governance now populate our civic setting.

There are traditional public entities with city councils and county commissions. There are also many private governments in the form of special taxing districts, business groups, infrastructure-based authorities, merchants' associations, homeowners' associations and condominium associations.

The principles for creating private governments to manage and operate the physical facilities that house our society are:

1. Governance needs a transparent and equitable organization that respects minority rights and the rule of law.
2. Governance organizations need to balance their role as agents for stability, and agents of change.
3. Transparent and candid communication systems build trust in organizations since trust comes in two types:
 - generalized trust...trust in strangers.
 - particularized trust...trust in people we know.
4. Mixed use places inherently foster communication due to the many places for scheduled and random encounters.
5. Private governance systems require careful design since they are contractual rather than constitutional and the relationship of representation, regulation and taxation can become abusive.

Public regulation of private governments is necessary.



Ah, public hearings; democracy in action.



Streets are important public spaces.



Public ceremonies for P3 projects are re-assuring.

**PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE
PLANNING TOOLS TO CREATE SOCIAL CAPITAL.**

The Challenge to physical planners, oft-times neglected, is to provide physical improvements to enhance and foster social capital and economic development. Buildings and outdoor spaces are designed to fulfill their traditional and commonly-held purposes, and they can enhance sociability and neighborhood civility. Values such as respect for the rules of mutual behavior, adherence to rituals, the capacity for self-reliance, connectivity, the perpetuation of fun-loving atmospheres and trust can be designed into public places and spaces.

The Tools available to the physical planner and neighborhood designer to create and enhance social and civic systems are several.

1. The Physical Development Plan’s Future Land Use Element.

The physical development plan locates buildings, streets, ponds and socialization-oriented amenities. Connections and beauty can promote social capital formation and economic development. Future Land Use and Circulation Plans delineate and articulate mixed use centers, multi-use corridors and neighborhoods with:

- **Buildings** that house public assembly activities like coffee shops, newspaper stands, theaters, city halls, libraries, neighborhood centers and fire houses.
- **Spaces/Places** for scheduled and random encounters such as gardens, dog parks, ball fields, walking trails, shoeshine stands, plazas and parks.
- **Physical Infrastructure** including multi-modal mobility systems for private vehicles, transit of all types, bikers and pedestrians, plus parks, schools, streets, utilities and shopping areas.

- **Natural Lands** for casual uses including parks and trails integrate and traverse wetlands, upland habitats, water management areas and water bodies.

2. The Social Infrastructure Plan.

The Social Infrastructure Plan identifies the programs and activities anticipated to create neighborhood spirit and hometown pride; and then to support these viscerally sensed activities through physical features that imbue the city and its’ inhabitants with this spirit and pride. The Social Capital Plan contains physical features to support:

- **Staffed Activity Programs** with program directors and socialization agents,
- **Leadership Training** for neighborhood leaders and volunteers,
- **Philanthropic, entertainment, education,** and related activities served by charities, clubs and foundations.
- **Activities requiring Places for Assembly** in buildings and outdoor spaces,
- **Communication Systems** using traditional methods and all forms of social media to send and receive information and ideas, and
- **Pre-Designed Private Governance Systems** such as homeowner and property owner groups.



- 3. **An Economic Development Plan** contains livability features that demonstrate why employers and employees should want to stay in the neighborhood, or move to it.
- 4. **The Funding and Finance Plan** provides the framework to fund the amenities and necessities of the neighborhood. Services from government are retreating. More of the burden for services is being born directly by residents and property owners through private governments. Public-private partnerships [P3s] and other partnerships are needed to provide the level of civic amenities necessary to retain and enhance the quality of neighborhoods.
- 5. **Marketing, Management and Maintenance Plans** are also necessary to continue to operate neighborhood associations and activities.



Cars are great socializing catalysts.



A docent makes an instructive point.



A small neighborhood stage for the "locals".



Clubs are the drivers of successful spaces.



Sidewalks are great places to converse.

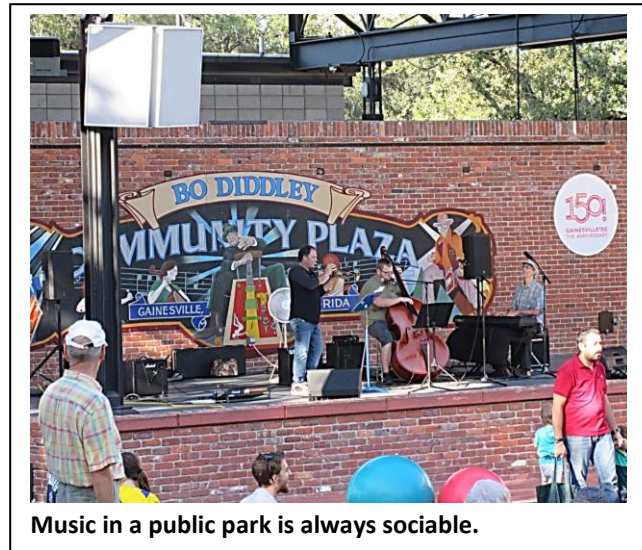
CONCLUSIONS: LESSONS FOR LEVERAGING PHYSICAL ASSETS TO PROMOTE NEIGHBORHOOD CIVILITY AND SOCIABILITY.

One can almost feel what creates successful society: culture history, ritual and social capital.

The neighborhood designer's assignment is to listen and observe; then to apply the lessons learned from other successful and unsuccessful places. The prize is an economically viable physical space that serves society's desire to be sociable and civil. The lessons are:

- 1. Social capital is a valuable asset worth protecting; once lost, it is hard to regain.** Many cities and towns are unpleasant, poor, hostile and hazardous. The reasons are many and profound, but, at the end of the day, successful towns have honest and competent leadership, a holistic, long-term idea about the future and a feeling that neighborhood needs matter as much as individual needs.
- 2. City Master Plans for Buildings and Spaces are most useful when they connect with Social and Economic Plans** that enable new and existing cities to holistically enhance and sustain their neighborhood's livability.
- 3. Social Capital, Neighborhood Spirit and Pride benefit from properly designed buildings and spaces.** The built environment matters. Buildings, plazas, streets, parks and other civic spaces host the social infrastructure that enables people to be social and connected. Urban design can strengthen the city's social and economic prosperity.
- 4. Neighborhood Leaders are Social Capital Entrepreneurs.** The neighborhood's leaders and risk takers form the foundation upon which social capital stands. **Social capital is not self-creating or self-regenerating.**

- 5. The city's Social Capital Plan should recognize, support and fully leverage leadership workshops and forums, high school programs, service club activities and contributions the city's many not-for-profit organizations make.** Protect and nurture neighborhood spirit.



- 6. Fun is Fundamental.** Successful neighborhoods have a joy about them. They have the "soft" civic amenities that enable fun, frivolity, neighborhood enhancements and personal growth. Most serious towns have a light-hearted atmosphere. Commitments to public art, parks, parades, concerts and festivals reflect this attitude.

