Designing great places

CHRIS MCCAHILL, PHD

Building Livable Communities: A Leadership Forum
Burlington, Vermont
December 12-13, 2014
We know a great place when we see it, but we don’t always understand its DNA.

So how can we create one?
ONE

ACCESSIBILITY IS KEY
Accessibility in the early motor age meant accessibility for cars.

Shown here: Futurama by Norman Bel Geddes at the 1939 New York World’s Fair
Post-1960

Separate buildings, bigger roads, and more parking
At the city scale:

- Bigger roads
- More parking
At the city scale:

Bigger roads
More parking

Photo credit: Chris McCaill
Walkable
Connected networks
Links between modes
Fine-grained mix of land uses

What makes a city accessible?

Photo credit: Chris McCahill
Incremental improvements.
Attention to public transit.
Never underestimate.

Photo credit: Chris McCahill
Some are easy to avoid.
TWO

MEASURE WHAT MATTERS
It’s common to measure **traffic** (congestion, delay, and level of service)

Where does that lead us?

Photo credit: Chris McCahill
The safest places are usually **compact and complex**.
Where will that lead us?

Less driving
Lower speeds
Calmer major roads
Dense street networks
Compact, walkable and bikeable

Measure accessibility by driving, by transit, by bike, and by foot.

How many amenities are within walking distance?

How many jobs are within 30 minutes?

Figure: Walk Score / Bike Score
Measure economic activity

Value per acre (High Point, NC)
Analysis by Joe Minicozzi / Urban3
Measure what matters to the community

Photo credit: Chris McCahill
THREE
RULES CAN BE FIXED
Cities are adopting flexible road design guidelines.

Work with key players:
Engineers, public works, emergency responders, and transit agencies.
Pasadena will no longer focus on vehicle performance measures in project reviews. They “encourage widening of intersections and streets, which may compromise the performance of non-auto modes and are increasingly contrary to community values.”
The Nashville Downtown Code relaxes **zoning**, eliminates **setbacks**, and omits **parking requirements** on 886 acres.
El Paso’s optional SmartCode creates new development incentives:

- Expedited permitting
- Eligibility for TIF funds

Major $100 million SmartCode neighborhood proposed for Northeast El Paso

City Council to vote on a proposed 30.8 acre project at the former Northgate Mall; developers seeks $13.7M in incentives

By Diana Washington Valdez / El Paso Times

POSTED: 12/01/2014 10:29:50 PM MST

Northeast El Paso may get its first SmartCode development if City Council approves a proposed 30.8-acre, $100-million project at the former site of Northgate Mall.

Conceptual maps and drawings depict a landscaped community of homes and loft apartments, offices, shops and stores, courtyards.
Cities are thinking creatively about public space.
1. Accessibility is key
2. Measure what matters
3. Rules can be fixed

Recognize and reinforce these ideas at every opportunity.