

ADVISORY COMMITTEE
FOR THE BORO OF BELMAR REDEVELOPMENT PLAN
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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I.0 History

On April 1, 2014, the Borough of Belmar Mayor and Council adopted Resolution 2014-65, “Creating a new advisory committee for the purpose of discussing the redevelopment of Belmar”. In accordance with this resolution, the committee assumed the responsibility of

1. Assessing the current redevelopment plan,
2. Identifying plan deficiencies,
3. Developing new ideas and improvements and
4. Finalizing and memorializing recommendations in a final report for future development of the Borough’s downtown area.

Appointed committee members were chosen from a variety of professional, business and civic backgrounds in order to provide a diverse and multi-level approach to recognizing existing redevelopment problems and providing ultimate solutions. In alphabetical order committee members consisted of Barry DePeppe, Zack Gross, Matt Mannion, Salvatore Marchese, Jay McDermott, Dave Morin, John Palus, Dominic Paragano, Krista Sperber, Edward Windas and Steve Voelfer. Of major assistance to the committee was Borough of Belmar employee, Kelly Williams, who acted as the committee’s secretary, recording meeting minutes, establishing meeting dates, posting legal notices of public meetings and other tasks necessary to the coordination of the committee’s meetings.

Between April and December 2014, the committee met on twelve (12) different occasions, with every other meeting being open to the public. Throughout this time several guest speakers, knowledgeable in various aspects of redevelopment and art, provided valuable input for the members. These included David Roberts, a professional planner with Maser Consultants, Gail O’Reilly, an administrator, instrumental in the redevelopment of the Borough of Red Bank and Patricia Hutchinson, a professor at The College of New Jersey and member of the Belmar Arts Council. These speakers provided insight and ideas on an art component for the redevelopment project. (See attached stricken redevelopment plan)

I.1 Mission Statement

Early on, the committee members recognized the need to establish a “Mission Statement” in which to guide and provide focus throughout the redevelopment planning process. As approved by the committee members, the statement is as follows:

To review and make recommendations to Mayor and Council for Belmar’s Redevelopment Plan as they relate to the downtown area. Said recommendations are expected to be available for presentation in December 2014.

I.2 Objectives

To provide a maximum level of consideration and discussion to the vast array of topics encompassing any municipal redevelopment plan, the committee identified those areas it felt were in most need of attention to accomplish it's goals. Each segmented topic, including Objectives, Summary of Findings and Recommendations, form the structure of the Report herein.

1. Neighborhoods / Establishment of Zones
2. Permitted Uses
3. Building Standards
4. Streetscape
5. Impediments to Design in the Existing Ordinances
6. Parking

I.3 Timeline

Pursuant to Resolution 2014 – 65 a final Report of Recommendations to be delivered to the Borough of Belmar Mayor and Council by the end of December 2014.

2.0 The Neighborhoods of the Belmar Downtown

The committee recommends that 4 “neighborhoods” be defined for the purpose of recognizing the unique, diverse characteristics of those areas, and enhancing the attraction of foot traffic and quality of life for residents utilizing business services in those areas.

The neighborhood areas are generally bound by the rectangle between Route 35 to the West and midway between Main Street and E Street to the East, the inlet to the North and I 6th Avenue to the South. The working names of each neighborhood are described below.

THE SEAPORT NEIGHBORHOOD

5th Avenue to 7th Avenue, Route 35 to the residences east of Main Street. The Seaport should reflect the water and Belmar’s history as a seaside town and has more of a marine look and feel.

There are one and two story buildings along Main Street. The primary businesses are dining, and retail. Residential is generally above the street level.

THE CENTRAL BUSINESS NEIGHBORHOOD

7th Avenue to I Ith Avenue, from the alley east of Main Street to railroad tracks. Retail, professional and dining. More diversity of stores would be encouraged. Encourage foot traffic. Residential is generally above the street level.

THE SUNSET HEIGHTS NEIGHBORHOOD

I Ith Avenue to I 6th Avenue, from the alley east of Main Street to railroad tracks.. Lower building heights, with a transition toward residential neighborhoods. Residential on Main Street is generally above the street level.

MARINA NEIGHBORHOOD

Route 35 to the railroad tracks, from 7th Avenue to Maclearie Park. (Commercial businesses, apartment and hotel.) Lower building structures are encouraged for future consideration, so not to further reduce the sunset views to the west.

2.1 Objectives

Designating the town into neighborhoods should give pedestrians a reason to move throughout the town – one interesting area can lead to another interesting area. Should make it pleasurable for people to move throughout the town. Mobility is key: bikes, trains, parking.

2.2 Summary of Findings

1. understanding outdoor space;
2. giving people a walkable trip (how far will people walk before getting into car); and
3. connectivity throughout the town – mobility strategies.
4. The concept that redevelopment should focus more on people rather than cars – how people move through a space. The space needs to “seem right.”

2.3 Recommendations

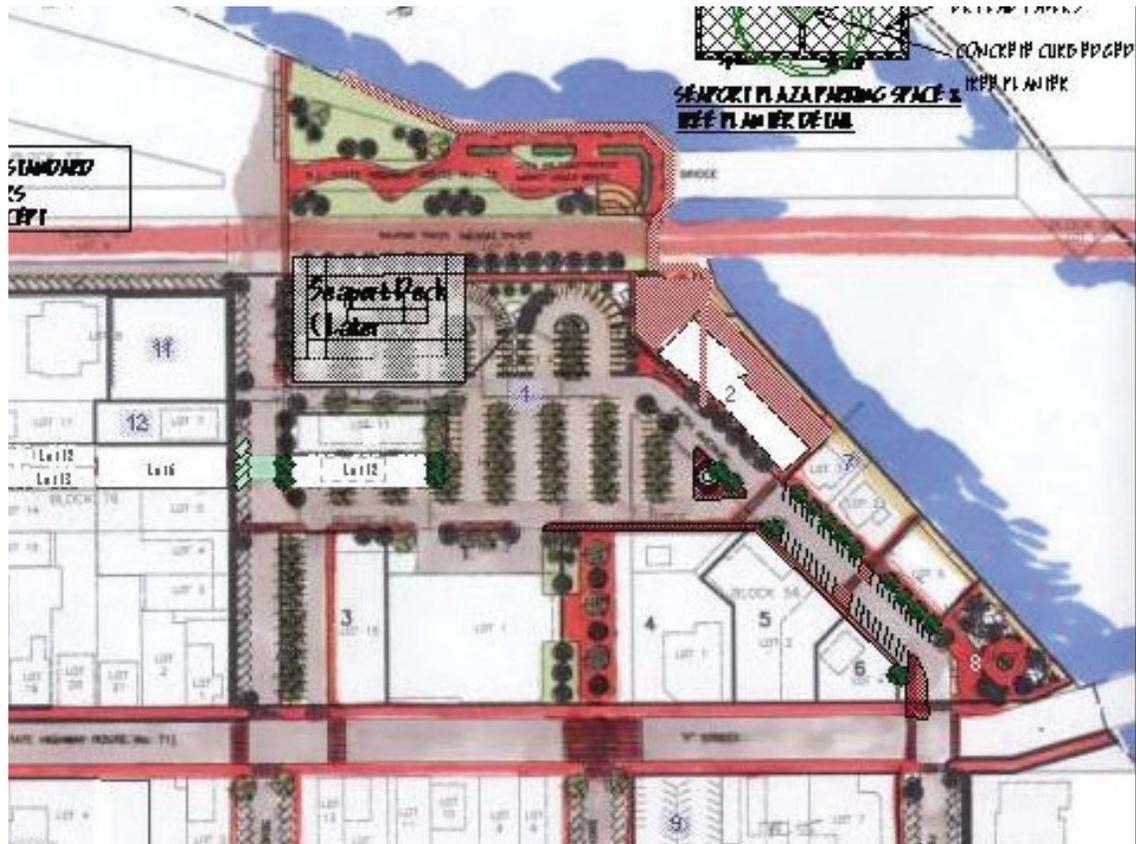
We need to do the improvements on 10th and 8th in order to really make it conducive for pedestrians to cross those intersection at Route 35. Creating a friendly access to the marina and encouraging people to walk from downtown to the inlet

Close 6th Avenue for pedestrian walkway to parking. Affirming the July 2011 plan.

Neighborhood Designations



Figure 4: Concept Plan for Seaport Plaza & Deck. March 2012.



3.0 Permitted uses

3.1 Objectives

Allow professionals on the first floor. Do not restrict permitted uses but let the market sort it out. Address Current ordinances restricting usage.

3.2 Summary of Findings

Be concerned with what the shape of this should be and not so much the use as the market will determine that.

3.3 Recommendations

- Current language of permitted uses is too narrow
- Contemplate the uses of all of Main Street.
- Allow Outdoor cafes
- Allow main floor professional



Examples of buildings that have suffered long term vacancy and in need of improvement.



4.0 Building Standards

- Vinyl siding and stucco should be discouraged on at street level
- Elements (gates, empty spaces, etc) should be set back from Main Street to enhance the aesthetics.
- Provide “means” (tax, financing) to “enhance” properties that are in disarray. Take a look at the business CO requirements, and see if there is an opportunity to push toward some of the external appearance initiatives being described by this committee.
- Create a checklist for property owners/developers: Painting, soffits, gutters in place, condition of awnings and windows displays, etc. to be amended into the role of the CO officer. Inspect at turnover.
- Offices on the first floor – build into the CO checklist that there be no files, papers, etc in the street-front windows
- Balance between encouraging initiatives and code enforcement
- Windows on street level should be cleaned up. Code enforcement could be utilized

4.1 Objectives

Leave an organic feel to the neighborhoods. Encourage people to get resources to improve their commercial properties.

4.2 Summary of Findings

Both sides of Main St. are not equal. There’s more density allowed on the west side of Main St. than the east side. It’s important to consider the residential properties and the effects of height and mass on those properties.

4.3 Recommendations

- Walking down Main Street, should be looked at like a room: the buildings are the walls, the trees are the “crown molding.” In other words, how close buildings come to street to create the right “feel” should be considered with all future development
- Improvements of exteriors at turnover. Inspection at change of tenancy
- Maintenance: All Window/Signage/Awnings must be maintained.
- Restrict what’s visible from windows at street level. (Professional offices: ie. stacks of boxes, storage, etc.)
- Encourage and enforce current code for maintenance standards, both interior and exterior
- Establish a Mayor’s Award to encourage participation on façade improvements.

5.0 Streetscape

5.1 Objective

To encourage more foot traffic with people spending time in the downtown and related areas by creating an aesthetically pleasing and safe walking experience.

5.2 Summary of Findings

Although the committee found that the downtown area has and continues to improve, it identified several areas of concern that need to be addressed to accomplish the objective referenced above.

1. Parking - Explore incorporating new parking areas as identified in Section 7.0 to provide connectivity to the downtown.
2. Architecture - Many buildings are not architecturally pleasing, requiring various façade improvements.
3. Walkways - Need to be more inviting, incorporating better lighting, plantings, pavers, signage etc.
4. Businesses - The issue of vacant stores and storefronts needs to be addressed.
5. New Development - Any new redevelopment plan should concentrate on providing a pleasurable atmosphere for pedestrians to move about town from one area to another.
6. Signage – Signs about town need to be more in compliance with current development regulations.

5.3 Recommendations

- Continue efforts to create an interesting, safe, varied and aesthetically pleasing walking thoroughfare about the downtown business district with foot traffic connectivity to the marina and surrounding neighborhoods.



- Bring in an architect(s) to provide simple ideas to enhance exterior appearance of older, unattractive buildings by incorporating new facades, moldings, windows, etc. in keeping with Belmar's seaport and Victorian character. This was accomplished in the Borough of Red Bank with great success.
- Seek and encourage a variety of stores, shops, professional offices and dining to make the downtown a regular destination year round. These may include antique shops, bookstores, etc. Allow professional establishments on the ground floor of buildings.
- Incorporate "Pocket Parks" adjacent to alleyways and vacant spaces with park benches, shrubs and artwork. By way of example; the small area between Belmar Paints and 507 Main, and others.
- Provide park benches and seating areas along Main Street to encourage shopping. Also provide trash and recycling receptacles, and more bike racks.
- Provide additional parking wherever it can be incorporated. See Parking Recommendation under Section 7.2 of this Report
- Continue the project of burying all overhead electrical lines begun in the south end of Main Street
- Provide pavers throughout the entire downtown shopping area.
- Provide attractive walkways to and from parking areas, the Marina, and residential neighborhoods.
- Incorporate various types of lighting about the downtown to accent pathways, seating areas, landscaped areas, walkways, buildings, etc.
- Main Street and the entire downtown require more greenery and landscaping. Suggest trees that have a faster growing time and / or planters that can hold trees or other shrubbery.



- Encourage potted flowers along downtown walkways. Encourage storeowners to incorporate flower window boxes during spring, summer and early fall.
- Encourage more awnings and attractive store front windows (Mayor's Award?).
- Owners of vacant buildings should be legally forced to bring their building into compliance with current codes to attract new business. Advertise vacant store real estate in other towns (i.e. BBP Link on Belmar.com).
- Establish guidelines for vacant space in town (window treatments, façade in good condition)
- Highly suggest incorporating art work (sculptures, murals, etc.) along walkways, pedestrian intersections; utilizing a common theme throughout.
- Encourage Business owners, where applicable, to include their business sign as part of the Streetscape.



6.1 Objectives

To define impediments within the existing ordinance and modify or eliminate these impediments; along with streamlining the approval process for Redevelopment applications.

6.2 Summary of Findings

1. The existing Redevelopment plan is confusing “at best” and lacks any clarity as to the Boro’s primary objectives for redevelopment along Main Street. The ordinance was re-written with Gale Corporations’ projects in mind and has strayed from being a master plan. The site specific zoning criteria no longer allow for a comprehensive or cohesive plan and the criteria cannot be applied universally throughout the redevelopment zone.
2. The ordinance should outline a clearly defined pathway for all redevelopment applications.
3. Parking criteria should be outlined in the ordinance. Currently there are inconsistencies in recently approved applications and the ordinance has no specific criteria for every redevelopment application to comply.
4. Tax abatements are recognized as a useful tool in promoting redevelopment; the current ordinance doesn’t address this matter at all.

6.3 Recommendations

1. Simplify the design standards
The current ordinance essentially defined the various Gale projects from 6 years ago. The permitted uses, bulk requirements (definition of height, setbacks and step backs, density, etc.) are confusing at best and very difficult to actually create a design that complies. The Advisory Board’s discussions were about redrafting an ordinance that used generally accepted redevelopment practices and designs with less specifics for each “parcel of development” and applying more general design requirements that allows for creative designs that meet generally accepted planning and design criteria.
2. Communication, Communication, Communication
Provide a pamphlet of timeline, checklist, flow chart of the approval process of an application to better communicate between the Boro and the applicant.
3. Streamline and clarify the exact procedures for a redevelopment application. Allow for an informal & expedited review process for conceptual development with Mayor, council & TDRC.
4. The Boro should appoint a redevelopment “Liason” as the “go to” person within Boro Hall. That person should be well versed on the ordinance requirements and the approval process and they should be able to expedite questions addressed to the Boro administration/mayor & council and assist in expediting the application, planning and review process of any application. Additionally, the Boro should cross train employees to at least have a general knowledge of the redevelopment ordinance and the application process. It’s quite common to get dismissed at Boro hall because the appropriate party isn’t available to answer or help.

5. Add an administrative staff member to the construction/zoning office to assist in the application and review process. The current part-time construction dept does an excellent job accommodating inspection requests; but the building dept needs to be expanded with “regular hours” for plan review and handling of the administrative requirements for any redevelopment application to be expedited.

6. Parking Criteria

The ordinance must incorporate a master plan to address the parking needs of our future downtown growth. Currently individual applications are reviewed and approved as almost a random act with inconsistencies in each application. Every applicant should comply with the design criteria to accommodate their parking; or contribute to a fund established by the Boro for future parking needs.

7. Tax Abatements

The Boro should incorporate a specific section in the ordinance to address tax abatements to promote rehab of existing structures and/ or promote redevelopment applications. Currently the existing ordinance doesn't address Tax Abatements.

The Boro should make every effort to minimize the costs for all redevelopment applications. Currently the redevelopment attorney collects a fee of \$10,000 for the same “boiler plate” RDA and FA documents. Additionally, the Boro collects an “improvement” fee from every application; but the ordinance doesn't clearly define the calculations or the purpose of this fee.

Narrow cross section and parking make it difficult to drive faster than 15 mph on this Lambertville, New Jersey, Main Street. Photo by Gary Toth



7.1 Objectives

Identify short term solutions to maximize available parking in the downtown area to be implemented while we await additional business occupancy to enable potential long term solutions.

7.2 Summary of Findings

There is wide misuse of parking within the borough— poor striping, empty lots; parking areas are not publicized / insufficient signage. Additionally certain areas are strained by current parking deficiencies that will only be exacerbated when recent projects that have been approved by the Borough are constructed. Through creative planning opportunities for additional parking are available.

7.2 Recommendations

SHORT TERM SURFACE AREA PARKING:

- I. Close 6th Avenue between Main Street & Railroad to create additional parking and park like setting at entrance to Borough Hall
 - A. This will enlarge the current lot behind the Municipal building.
 - B. This will also provide for a second meeting area in the Borough to complement Pyanoe Plaza that will be further away to allow events to be held without creating a deficit in the main commercial corridor
 - C. Dedicated parking for the Paint store and Garden Spot may be required
 - D. This will help offset some of anticipated parking demand associated with future development of the Icehouse

Interactive Art Installations



2. Incorporate diagonal parking along Main Street on one side
 - A. This will provide additional parking along the Main street corridor
 1. Potentially 25% or greater increase in parking availability
 - B. Belmar's Main Street is wider than the Spring Lake Main Street so there will be slightly more room for circulation
 1. This will slow traffic down along Main Street
 2. May result in less friendly bicycle travel
3. Restripe parking behind 10th Ave Burrito & remainder of Belmar Plaza to make more consumer friendly
 - A. Address outdoor storage and refuse collection elements
 - B. Add angled or parallel spaces along 8th Ave on street next to outside bar and expand on parking on westbound 8th Ave heading towards Route 35.
4. Incorporate diagonal parking on east side of Doughboy park
 - A. This would provide parking for overflow for the Marina or the new building on the Ice House Property.
 - B. Would involve moving the curb, sidewalk, and potentially some trees
5. Creating alleyways for blocks east of Main Street between 5th-14th Avenue similar to what was done at Stay Gold and Rite Aid properties between 8th & 9th Avenues
 - A. Will require all property owners on that street to agree to modification
 - B. Will reduce traffic along Main Street
 - C. Reduces curb cuts to Main Street thereby increasing parking available
 - D. Creates an improved streetscape

Better Block Philly created a series of temporary street changes to demonstrate the value of reallocating street capacity for all uses. Here a parklet was created. Photo by Gary Toth



6. Coordinate with Bank of America to provide for additional parking.
7. Meter parking at the Marina
 - A. Currently there is an abundance of fisherman/boaters that do not carpool and utilize parking spaces for extended periods of time
 1. Possible validation system for parking discounts
 2. Promote carpooling to reduce parking impact
 - B. Using the South Marina lot as a valet lot for Main Street restaurants and Pier 9 through a lease agreement.
8. Parking head on/diagonal along the walkway at the Marina in place of parallel spaces
 - A. May require modification to curb line on other side of drive aisle in some places

LONG TERM PARKING SUGGESTIONS:

1. Construct a parking garage
 - A. Primary spot would where the Elks Bldg./Arts Council Lot behind Boro hall.
 1. Need to establish funding
 - a. All developers/property owners that do not meet borough ordinance would need to pay into fund
 - B. Secondary location could be adjacent to Family Dollar by train station
 1. Would likely need to coordinate with owner of Belmar Plaza to provide additional site yield by allowing increased building height for residential
2. Changing the light pattern at 8th & 10th Avenue to make it easier to cross on the highway.
 - A. Change streetscape at 8th & 10th Avenues at Route 35 to slow traffic.
 - B. An overpass be built at 10th Avenue to encourage parking at the marina.
3. Meter parking along Main Street
 - A. Can provide free time pass (20 min – 1 hour) every time you hit button to promote short term shopping and to prevent long term parking in commercial area

8.1 Recommendations

1. Pictures help people envision any plans and that sketches should be kept “loose” early in order to allow for changes and “buy-in” from those concerned
2. “Taming the highway” (crossing Rte 35). Look for funding for a mobility plan/mobility study for 8th Ave. & 10th Ave..
3. Talk to DOT. Study how people move about town. It may be possible to get the Department of Transportation to provide funding for necessary studies. Incentive grants do exist although they might not be as available as they once were.
4. Questions that need to be considered in forming a plan are:
 - A. How does the town grow? and how do we want it to grow?
 - B. We don't want to grow more than we can support.

SUGGESTIONS INCLUDE:

1. The sidewalks (i.e. pavement) should not be more interesting than the storefronts.
2. Start with the little things, such as painting. (parking stripes, buildings, etc.)
3. don't have blank walls;
4. Get the demand, get the people in Belmar and then worry about the parking (parking garages)

City Comforts
by David Sucher;

Placemaking Main Street into a Destination Downtown
by Gary Toth and Fred Kent
Main Street Now Magazine, Fall-2014

Walkability is Good for You
<http://www.citylab.com/design/2014/12/growing-evidence-shows-walkability-is-good-for-you-and-for-cities/383612/>

Placemaking Main Street into a Destination Downtown

By Project for Public Spaces on Dec 4, 2014

This article, written by Gary Toth and Fred Kent of PPS, originally appeared in the 35th anniversary edition of Main Street Now, the Journal of the National Main Street Center. You can view the original (and more) in their digital copy [here](#).

The traditional Main Street is one of the most iconic images of America. With its unique blend of housing, retail, and civic uses, Main Street served as the social and commercial hub of communities until World War II. Since then, suburban development favoring shopping malls and single-use zoning have driven resources away from these vital places. Furthermore, the devaluing of places due to the 20th century obsession with tuning streets for high speed mobility has also taken its toll. Not only is fast-moving traffic less likely to stop, but speed kills a street's sense of place and diminishes its value for all users.

Thankfully, today various organizations and communities are working to restore the historic functions of main streets and reestablish them as the centers of towns and cities. Many have achieved success by using the Main Street Approach, a unique tool that combines organization, promotion, design, and economic restructuring to help build a complete revitalization effort. Collectively, these tools are called the Four Point Approach and have done much to reverse damage created by the first wave of competition for Main Streets: the rise of the suburban mall.

Main Streets are now facing a second wave of competition: online shopping. The ability to “window shop” from the comfort of one’s home has created an all new challenge; but, in this case, Main Street has an advantage over malls: the power to create Place. Increasingly, as electronic communication has made it possible to live anywhere and still connect with others, the freedom to work and play apart has increased the sense of isolation and the craving for new ways of interacting socially and meeting informally. Main Street is far better positioned to fulfill that burgeoning need than malls. Being geographically positioned within walking distance of neighborhoods, Main Streets are suited perfectly to evolve, via Placemaking, into the great destinations of the 21st century.

HOW CAN PLACEMAKING HELP RESTORE MAIN STREETS TO THE FOREFRONT IN THE 21ST CENTURY?

“Placemaking” provides a powerful set of tools for change. Not a new profession, discipline, or field of study, Placemaking brings out the best of professional knowledge and skills while supporting a participatory process that challenges and empowers local communities to take ownership over the planning process. Disciplines will no longer be working in silos but instead subjugating their expertise to the larger goal of creating great Main Streets.

Stakeholder buy-in will be quicker and more sustainable. Thanks to their informality and simplicity, Placemaking tools such as the Power of Ten; Walking and Street Audits; and Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper will extend the reach and simplify conversations about a project enough to allow everyone to contribute, not just the experts and a few businesses.

These tools involve everyone directly in determining the scope and shaping the preliminary design process in informal settings, as citizens work side by side with subject matter experts. Formal roles are not predefined but emerge throughout the process, which is managed to ensure participation by all. Everyone will participate in creating Main Street goals in ways that move them from passive supporters to active project advocates. What results will be a richer more livable plan since it goes beyond the “three D’s” (density, design, and diversity of uses) of modern smart growth planning and the Four Points of the Main Street Approach.

THE POWER OF TEN.

In a nutshell, the Power of Ten means that people will be attracted to Main Streets where there are lots of things to do. The Power of Ten (POT aka Placemapping) process will engage stakeholders to assess the assets and liabilities (i.e., underperforming places) of Main Street. Rather than have experts bring formulae in from other towns, Placemapping will allow local stakeholders to identify the best, worst, and highest opportunity places and help them figure out how to make substantive physical and social connections between existing spaces, how to strategically create new places, and how to harness the energy that can be generated through building a network of destinations.

Walking and street audits can also be conducted to diagnose places along Main Street and create a wish list of desired future change. Any potential future changes can be tested out via Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper (LQC) strategies. LQC provides a visual representation of what an appropriate street, sidewalk, or building wall change can look like. It can also demonstrate how street changes would affect flow, not only for cars, but also for pedestrians, cyclists, and transit, as well as show the benefits (or detriments) to sidewalk and shopping activity. The tangibility of doing this in real life, as opposed to simply doing a traffic study, is important for developing community buy-in.

WHICH PLACEMAKING CONCEPTS CAN BE APPLIED TO MAIN STREETS? CREATING MULTI-USE DESTINATIONS

“ It’s difficult to design a space that won’t attract people. What is remarkable is how often this is accomplished.”

– William H. Whyte

We know that the more uses public spaces can accommodate, the more successful they will become as community gathering places. Simply stated, the more varied the uses, the more varied the audience becomes. But still we are designing and managing too many places that have only a single purpose—whether it is a park, a square, or a street. All too often, uses and people don’t mix. As our communities become more diverse and populous, we will not only need more public spaces; we will need places where people of different backgrounds feel comfortable coming together. How can we promote more of the right kind of design, management, and investment to create multi-use public spaces and places?

MARKET CITIES AND LOCAL ECONOMIES

“When you want to seed a place with activity, put out food.”

– William H. Whyte

Historically, cities grew around their marketplaces—bustling centers of commerce and activity. As communities grew, they became market cities. At the National Main Streets Conference in Detroit, we talked about the need to expand the Placemaking conversation to more than traditional farmers markets and public markets—to encompass all types of districts that seed local economies while creating great gathering places. Markets are great catalysts for the creation of and organic growth of such places. The growth of farmers markets in the U.S. (now more than 7,000) offer the raw material for a broader rebirth of local economies and places. There is new interest in all things local. How can we take advantage of these trends to advance local places and economies?

ARCHITECTURE OF PLACE/COMMUNITY ANCHORS

“What attracts people most, it would appear, is other people.”

– William H. Whyte

Placemaking brings new ways of redefining the nature and function of libraries, art and cultural institutions, city halls, and other institutions. Indeed, there are an increasing number of innovative examples of individual institutions that are becoming multi purpose “community anchors,” not just iconic design statements. How can we encourage more building owners (whether institutions, corporations, developers, or governments) and their designers to promote an “architecture of place”—creating place-supportive design that also redefines the public gathering roles these institutions play in communities?

STREETS AS PUBLIC SPACES

While streets are the most fundamental public spaces in communities, they may also be the most conflicted and underrecognized. “Streets as Public Spaces” is premised on the idea that streets should not simply move people from point A to point B, but must add value to the community along the way. Streets can no longer be viewed simply as arteries for conveying cars; even “Complete Streets” may not be complete enough. Great streets build communities as well as provide ways of connecting other great places. This is what links communities of all sizes together. As we gather in Pittsburgh prior to a major conference on walking and biking, how can we move communities to this broader vision of streets and transportation investments?

PRINCIPLES FOR FOSTERING MAIN STREETS AS PUBLIC SPACES

RULE ONE: DESIGN FOR APPROPRIATE SPEEDS

Streets need to be designed in a way that induces traffic speeds appropriate for that particular context. Whereas freeways should retain high-speeds to accommodate regional mobility, speeds on other roads need to reflect that they are places for people, not just conduits for cars. Desired speeds can be attained with a number of design strategies, including changes in roadway widths, curvature, and intersection design. Of course, Placemaking is a big part of the success; and roadside

strategies, like building setbacks and sidewalk activity, can also affect the speed at which motorists comfortably drive.

Speed kills sense of place. City and town centers are destinations, not raceways, and commerce needs traffic—foot traffic. You cannot buy a dress from a car. Even foot traffic speeds up in the presence of fast moving vehicles. Access, not automobiles, should be the priority in city centers. Don't ban cars, but remove the presumption in their favor. People first!

RULE TWO: PLAN FOR COMMUNITY OUTCOMES

Cities and towns need first to envision the kinds of places and interactions they want to support and then plan a transportation system consistent with this collective community vision. Transportation is a means for accomplishing important goals—like economic productivity and social engagement—not an end in itself. Less than three months after PPS facilitated a capacity-building workshop in Brunswick, Maine, the community began lighter, quicker and cheaper changes to its Main Street, blocking off a lane with barrels to see how it affected pedestrian and shopping activity and traffic flow.

Great transportation facilities, such as Grand Central Terminal in New York City and the wide sidewalks of the Champs Elysées, have truly improved the public realm. Designing road projects to fit community contexts can help increase developable land, create open space, and reconnect communities to their neighbors, a waterfront, or a park. They can reduce household dependency on the automobile, allowing children to walk to school, connecting neighborhoods to downtowns, and helping build healthier lifestyles by increasing the potential to walk or cycle. Think public benefit, not just private convenience.

For years we've seen this philosophy gain traction in leading cities around the world. Barcelona has built boulevards and Ramblas (broad avenues) that give pedestrians priority over the automobile. Paris has developed a neighborhood traffic-calming program to rival that of any city anywhere. By charging congestion fees for vehicles entering the city center, London has successfully reduced traffic levels and funded an aggressive program to improve transit. Bogotá now boasts a world-class rapid transit bus system and has established a mandate to eliminate private auto use during the morning rush hour by 2015. These projects offer strategies that can be used to redesign our transportation networks to reflect their true importance as public spaces and manifestations of our vision for our towns and cities.

It is also essential to foster landuse planning at the community level that supports, instead of overloads, the transportation network. This includes creating more attractive places that people will want to visit in both new and existing developments. A strong sense of place benefits the overall transportation system. Great Places—popular spots that have a good mix of people and activities and can be comfortably reached by walking, biking, and perhaps by public transit as well as by car—put little strain on the transportation system. Poor land-use planning, by contrast, generates thousands of unnecessary vehicular trips, creating dysfunctional roads, which further deteriorate the quality of places. Transportation professionals can no longer pretend that land use is not their business. Transportation projects that were not integrated with land-use planning have created too many negative impacts to ignore.

RULE THREE: THINK OF STREETS AS PUBLIC SPACES

Not so long ago, this idea was considered preposterous in many communities. “Public space” meant parks and little else. Transit stops were simply places to wait. Streets had been surrendered to traffic for so long that we hardly considered them public spaces at all. But now we are slowly moving away from this narrow perception of “streets as conduits for cars” and beginning to think of “streets as places.”

The road, the parking lot, the transit terminal—they can all serve more than one mode (cars) and more than one purpose (movement). Sidewalks are the urban arterials of cities: make them wide, well lit, and stylish and accommodating with benches, outdoor cafes, and public art. Roads can be shared spaces with pedestrian refuges, bike lanes, and on-street parking. Parking lots can become public markets on weekends. Even major urban arterials can be designed to provide dedicated bus lanes, well-designed bus stops that serve as gathering places, and multi-modal facilities for bus rapid transit or other forms of travel. Roads are places too! Transportation—the process of traveling to a place—can be wonderful if we rethink the idea of transportation itself. If we remember that transportation is the journey, but enhancing the community is the goal.

Walkability Is Good for You

A slew of new research links walkable neighborhoods with safer, healthier, more democratic places.

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Ever since Jane Jacobs' classic *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, urbanists have extolled the ideal of the dense, mixed-used, walkable neighborhood, contrasting it with the dull and deadly cul-de-sacs of car-oriented suburbs.

If walkability has long been an “ideal,” a recent slew of studies provide increasingly compelling evidence of the positive effects of walkable neighborhoods on everything from housing values to crime and health, to creativity and more democratic cities.

A key research advance has been the development of the Walk Score metric (we have written about it here before), which provides a baseline measure for walkable communities. Walk Score uses data from Google, OpenStreetMap and the U.S. Census to assign any address a walkability ranking from zero to 100 based on its pedestrian friendliness and distance to amenities such as grocery stores, restaurants, public transit, and the like.

A growing body of research shows the connection between walkability and housing prices. Earlier this year, economist Christopher Leinberger expanded on his earlier research on “walkable urban places” and found that they have outsized economic impacts. Among the top 30 American metros, these walkable urban places account for one percent of available acreage, but compose as much as 50 percent of the country’s office, hotel, apartment, and retail square footage.

A recently published study in the journal *Cities* uses Walk Score to reinforce these findings. The study, by the University of Louisville’s John Gilderbloom, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo’s William Riggs, and Georgia Regents University’s Wesley Meares, examines the effect of walkability on housing values and foreclosures in the wake of economic crises across 170 Census tracts in Louisville, Kentucky. It finds that walkability is statistically significant in predicting neighborhood housing values, and that it is significantly and negatively correlated with neighborhood foreclosures. Between 2000–2006 and 2000–2008, walkability predicated an increase in property values, though the same could not be said of the 2000-2010 period because of the housing collapse. Walkable areas also saw fewer foreclosures in the 2004-2008 period, with highly walkable neighborhoods having 11 fewer total foreclosures. Overall, walkability was almost as important as race in influencing median housing values and foreclosures.

Gilderbloom et al.’s map of Louisville’s most walkable places. The most walkable census tracts are in black. (Gilderbloom et al.)

Urbanists have long believed that there is a connection between walkability and crime. Jacobs argued that walkable, denser neighborhoods benefited from “eyes on the street,” or the natural surveillance that occurs in neighborhoods where people are frequently coming and going at all hours of the day. Conversely, criminologists have seen a connection between density, crime, and social pathologies.

Gilderbloom and his team initially found little overall relationship between walkability and crime. But the connection came to the fore when the researchers controlled for the effects of race. Sociologists have long noted the connection between concentrated poverty, race, and crime in urban areas. The study found walkability to be associated with decreased property crime, murders, and violent crime in neighborhoods where minorities made up less than half of all residents. The same held for neighborhoods that were 75 percent white.

Other research has examined the connection between walkability and health. Medical research shows that walking can improve health outcomes in everything from heart disease and diabetes to improved mental and cognitive functions. But does living in walkable neighborhoods really confer these kinds of benefits?

The study found a statistically significant connection between walkability and health.

A separate, forthcoming study by Riggs and Gilderbloom examined the effects of walkability on health outcomes in Louisville between 2000 and 2010. To get at this, they employed, a metric of “years of potential life lost” per 100,000 residents, which measures the difference between life expectancy and the age at which a resident actually dies.

Their study found a statistically significant connection between walkability and health. This effect was even greater in the neighborhoods with the highest concentration of minorities and the poor. As they note, “there are true ‘human costs’ to less walkable, livable environment[s].” Not surprisingly, Riggs and Gilderbloom found health outcomes to be closely associated with both income and race, noting the significant negative relationship between income and years of potential life lost (the poorer you are, the more years of life you’re losing) and a highly significant positive relationship between non-white residents and increased mortality (if you’re not white, you’re more likely to die early).

Research from the University of Kansas’ Alzheimer’s Disease Center indicates that walkable cities also have positive implications for cognitive health. The study, by psychologist Amber Watts, tracked 25 people with mild Alzheimer’s disease and 39 older adults with cognitive impairment. Watts found that those who lived in areas of higher “integration,” where fewer turns are required to navigate the streets, performed worse on baseline cognition tests and were more likely to see declines in attention and verbal memory. Conversely, those who lived in places with higher connectivity, with more paths and streets linked to each address, performed better on initial cognitive tests and saw fewer declines in attention and verbal memory.

A spatial map of integration. The most integrated areas, in red, are those that provide walkers with fewer path options. Watts’ work found associations between highly integrated places and cognition declines in older residents. (Farhana Ferdous, KU Dept. of Architecture).

A spatial map of connectivity. The most highly connected paths, in red, are those that are linked to many streets, giving walkers many path options. Watts’ work found associations between a place’s connectivity and better performance on cognition tests among its older residents. (Farhana Ferdous, KU Dept. of Architecture)

“There seems to be a component of a person’s mental representation of the spatial environment, for example, the ability to picture the streets like a mental map,” Watts said in a statement. “Complex environments may require more complex mental processes to navigate. Our findings suggest that people with neighborhoods that require more mental complexity actually experience less decline in their mental functioning over time.”

Denser, more walkable urban environments have also been said to spur more social interactions of the sort that encourage creativity, as well as higher levels of civic engagement. A forthcoming study by my former Carnegie Mellon student Brian Knudsen of Urban Innovation Analysis, Terry Clark of the University of Chicago, and my colleague Daniel Silver of the University of Toronto examines the connection between walkability, creativity, and civic engagement in the U.S., Canada, and France. The researchers examined the effects of neighborhood density, connectivity, housing, age diversity, and walkability on arts employment and the incidence of what they dub “social movement organizations,” or SMOs. (SMOs include groups advocating for environmental and human rights issues, among others.)

“Walking amidst the arts appears to heighten imaginative openness to new social and political possibilities.”

Their findings are striking. Walking is associated with higher levels of arts organizations, creativity, and civic engagement. In fact, walkability is more closely linked with both the arts and SMOs than variables like density and housing age diversity. “In our results, walking appears as one of most powerful drivers of creativity,” the researchers write. They also find that walking enhances the connection between creativity and civic engagement:

[W]alking, the arts, and social-movement activism are not only separate processes. They enhance one another. Walking amidst the arts appears to heighten imaginative openness to new social and political possibilities, energizing SMO activity more powerfully than walking on its own. Walking is important, but not all walking is the same, and when it occurs in locales with more arts activity, its impact on SMOs is greater.

Walkability is no longer just an ideal. The evidence from a growing body of research shows that walkable neighborhoods not only raise housing prices but reduce crime, improve health, spur creativity, and encourage more civic engagement in our communities.