

Eleven

Neighborhoods should be compact, pedestrian-friendly, and mixed-use. Districts generally emphasize a special single use, and should follow the principles of neighborhood design when possible. Corridors are regional connectors of neighborhoods and districts; they range from boulevards and rail lines to rivers and parkways.

ELIZABETH PLATER-ZYBERK

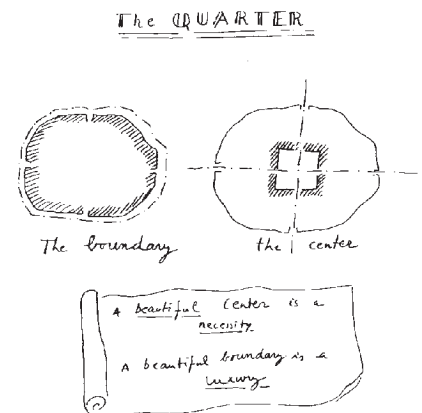
The fundamental elements of a true urbanism are the neighborhood, the district, and the corridor. Neighborhoods are urbanized areas having a balanced range of human activity. Districts are urbanized areas organized around a predominant activity such as a college campus. Corridors are linear systems of transportation or green space that connect and separate the neighborhoods and districts.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Neighborhoods mass together to form towns and cities. A single neighborhood isolated in the landscape is a village. Though the nomenclature varies, there is general agreement regarding the composition of the neighborhood. The neighborhood unit of the 1929 New York Regional Plan, the Quarter (right) described by Leon Krier, the traditional neighborhood development (TND), and transit-oriented development (TOD) all share similar attributes. They are:

1. THE NEIGHBORHOOD HAS A CENTER AND AN EDGE.

The combination of a focus and a limit contribute to the social identity of the community. Though both are important, the center is necessary. The center is usually a public space — a square, a green, or an important street intersection. It is located near the center of the neighborhood unless geography dictates that it be located elsewhere. Eccentric locations may be justified by a shoreline, a transportation corridor, or a promontory creating a view.



“In recent decades Americans have been focusing too much on the house itself and too little on the neighborhood, too much on the interior luxury and too little on public amenity. By reconsidering the design of our houses, we might begin again to create walkable, stimulating, more affordable neighborhoods where sociable pleasures are always within reach. The country can learn much from the neighborly kinds of housing we used to build. They made — and continue to make — good places for living.”

PHILIP LANGDON

BY 1928, THERE WERE ALREADY 21.3 MILLION CARS on America’s roads. Clarence Stein and Henry Wright’s 1928 general plan for Radburn, New Jersey, put the pedestrian first by placing most of life’s needs within a short stroll

The center is the location for civic buildings, such as libraries, meeting halls, and churches. Commercial buildings including shops and workplaces are also associated with the center of a village. But in the aggregations of neighborhoods that create towns and cities, commercial buildings are often at the edge where, combined with the commercial edges of other neighborhoods, they form a town center.

The edge of a neighborhood varies in character. In villages, the edge borders the lowest density of housing and is usually defined by land reserved for cultivation or conservation in a natural state. In urban areas, the neighborhood edge is often defined by boulevards or parkways, which may be lined by higher-density buildings.

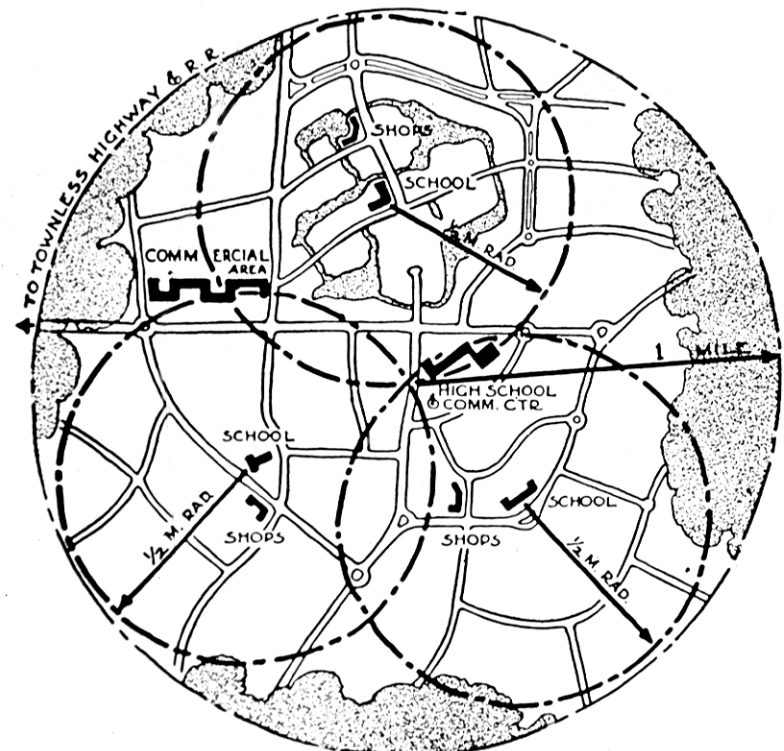


in neighborhoods for 10,000 people. Shopping centers placed at the edges are accessible both by foot and by car.

2. THE NEIGHBORHOOD HAS A BALANCED MIX OF ACTIVITIES: SHOPPING, WORK, SCHOOLING, RECREATION, AND ALL TYPES OF HOUSING.

This arrangement is particularly useful for those — young, old, handicapped, or poor — who can’t depend on the automobile for mobility.

The neighborhood provides housing for a range of incomes. Affordable housing types include backyard cottages, apartments above shops, and row-houses. Houses and apartments for the wealthy may occupy the choice sites.



3. THE IDEAL SIZE OF A
NEIGHBORHOOD IS A QUARTER-
MILE FROM CENTER TO EDGE.

This distance is the equivalent of a five-minute walk at an easy pace. Within this five-minute radius, residents can walk to the center from anywhere in the neighborhood to take care of many daily needs or to use public transit. The location of a bus or light-rail stop within this walking distance substantially increases the likelihood that people will use public transit.

A cluster or string of transit-oriented neighborhoods creates a regional network of villages, towns, and cities that people can get to without relying solely on cars. Such a system provides access to major cultural and social institutions, a variety of shops, and the kind of broad job base that can be supported only by a substantial population of many neighborhoods.

4. NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS ARE
DETAILED TO PROVIDE EQUALLY
FOR THE PEDESTRIAN, THE BICYCLE,
AND THE AUTOMOBILE.

Neighborhood streets that provide wide sidewalks, street trees, and on-street parking increase pedestrian activity. People are more apt to want to walk or bicycle if the route provides safe, pleasant, shady sidewalks and bike lanes. Drivers are more apt to drive slower in areas with pedestrian-filled sidewalks, crosswalks, and convenient, on-street parking. Streets designed for pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers also encourage the casual meetings among neighbors that help form the bonds of community.

Neighborhood streets are laid out to create blocks for building sites and to shorten pedestrian routes. An interconnected network of streets and small blocks provides multiple driving routes that diffuse traffic and keep local traffic away from long-range transportation corridors.

5. THE NEIGHBORHOOD GIVES PRIOR-
ITY
TO THE CREATION OF PUBLIC SPACE
AND TO THE APPROPRIATE LOCA-
TION
OF CIVIC BUILDINGS.

Private buildings form an edge that delineates public spaces and the private block interior. Public spaces such as formal squares, informal parks, and small playgrounds provide places for gathering and recreation. Sites that honor individuals or events are reserved for public buildings such as schools, municipal buildings, and concert halls. Such sites help support the civic spirit of the community and provide places where people can gather for educational, social, cultural, and religious activities.

THE DISTRICT

The district is an urbanized area with special functions, such as a theater district, capitol area, or college campus. Other districts accommodate large-scale transportation or workplaces, such as industrial parks, airports, storage and shipping terminals, and refineries. Although districts preclude the full range of activities of a neighborhood, they need not be

“We complain that the streets of the urban peripheries are boring, that they do not offer the same opportunities for encounter, exchange, curiosity, attention, offered by the streets of the historic centers. It is not surprising, as the streets of the historic centers were made for the motion of human beings whereas the streets of the periphery have been made for the motion of automobiles.”

GIANCARLO DE CARLO
The Contemporary Town





THE CITY OF WEST SACRAMENTO. A neighborhood center connected to a town center at a transit stop.

the single-activity zones of suburbia; complementary activities can support the district's primary identity.

The structure of the district parallels the neighborhood. It has an identifiable focus that provides orientation and identity, and clear boundaries that allow for special taxing or management organizations. Like the neighborhood, the district features public spaces — plazas, sidewalks, important intersections — that reinforce a sense of community among users, encourage pedestrians, and ensure security. Transit systems benefit districts greatly and should be connected to neighborhoods within a regional network.

THE CORRIDOR

The corridor is the connector or separator of neighborhoods and districts. Corridors are composed of natural and technical components ranging from wildlife trails to rail lines. The corridor is not the haphazardly residual “open space” buffering the enclaves of suburbia, but a deliberate civic element characterized by its continuity. It is defined by the boundaries of neighborhoods and districts and provides entry to them.

The path of a transportation corridor is determined by the intensity of its use. Highways and

heavy-rail corridors remain tangential to towns and cities and enter only the industrial districts. Light rail and bus corridors may be incorporated into the boulevards at the edges of neighborhoods, where transit stops are designed for pedestrian use and can accommodate building sites. Bus corridors may pass into neighborhood centers on small conventional streets.

Transportation corridors may be laid out within continuous parkways, providing long-distance walking and bicycle trails and a continuous natural habitat. Green corridors or greenways can also be formed by natural systems such as streams, drainage ditches engineered for irrigation, or as a result of drainage systems for water runoff. These greenways may include recreational open spaces, such as parks, playing fields, schoolyards, and golf courses. Such continuous natural spaces should gradually flow to the rural edges, connecting the regional ecosystem.

“Above all else, a city is a means of providing a maximum number of social contacts and satisfactions. When the open spaces gape too widely, and the dispersal is too constant, the people lack a stage for their activities and the drama of their daily life lacks sharp focus.”

LEWIS MUMFORD

The Highway and the City

ELIZABETH PLATER-ZYBERK

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