

Streets as Places

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There was a time in our cities and towns when getting from here to there was a pleasant and often enriching experiences. As the automobile encroached, people and places were pushed aside. The major problems with most streets are:

Blank walls—The ground floors have no doors, shops, services or other features that encourage public activity.

Wide street---A vast expanse of roadway with six wide traffic lanes that monopolizes the majority of the space.

Fast moving traffic---Cars pass quickly and the drivers are only concerned with reaching their destinations as fast as possible.

Narrow sidewalks----Most sidewalks are too narrow for proper use and safety.

Overall image—There is a sense of isolation and safety concerns. These facts coupled with the very real threat posed in trying to walk across the street with very fast moving cars.

A place gives everyone a strong sense of community. A place is:

Activity and interest at the street level—Individuals feel they belong.

Comfortably scaled street---The road is narrower with fewer lanes of traffic.

Slow moving traffic and on-street parking—The vehicle traffic is in balance with pedestrian activities. Drivers pull in and out of parking spaces at a leisurely pace that does not intimidate people.

Ample sidewalks----There is room on the sidewalk for individuals to walk and for other pedestrian-friendly activities, like sidewalk cafes.

Overall images---The street has a personality that identifies it as a special place. It is easy to cross---from one side to the other, adding to the overall feeling of safety.

When individuals describe their communities now, they refer to streets that are too wide to cross without feeling endangered by traffic, sidewalks that are too empty to feel safe, and lack of places to sit or stroll and a dearth of interesting and attractive things to look at and to keep their interest.

There are too many remedies that make things worse. These are:

One-way streets -----These lead to excessive traffic speeds, decreases pedestrian safety, complicates access to neighboring areas, less street life and reduces business activity.

Elimination of on-street parking—This adds more traffic lanes to the street and encourages more speeding traffic. Neighborhood business suffers due to preventing motorists from easily stopping or to do errands along the street. Parking garages only take individuals off the street completely.

Traffic signal timing—Traffic lights are synchronized in order to have traffic continuing to move steadily without having to stop at red lights. This means less

walk time so it creates a dangerous situation for crossing the street especially for older individuals, children and physical disabilities.

Broad corner turning curves---This creates higher speeds for vehicles, longer crossing area and less warnings time to see oncoming cars. It is extremely dangerous for pedestrians.

Speed limits and street designs—The design of the street affects how fast individuals drive. Research shows that at 20 miles per hour a pedestrian has only a 5 percent chance of being killed, most injuries are slight and 30 percent suffer no injuries. At 30 miles per hour, 45 percent of pedestrians are killed and many are injured seriously. At 40 miles per hour, 85 percent are killed.

Valuable lessons from the past show living, lasting, livable places that still function today. Examples are:

Oberlin, Ohio—narrow streets, diagonal parking, slow traffic, allowing for pleasant and walkable pedestrian area

Nantucket, Massachusetts—wonderful ambiance, quaint shops and houses, benches around old trees, gaslight-style street lamps, walking and bicycling into and throughout the town, shuttle buses, curving narrow roads, cobblestone streets

Charleston, South Carolina—narrow alleys, cobblestone streets, relaxed pedestrian tempo, small-scale streets, low-rise buildings standing side by side in the residential and business district, walkable streets, T intersection where you stop jog 90 degrees and then turn again, central straw market, diagonal parking lanes, outdoor cafes, homes well kept, historical, active BAR (Board of Architectural Review), window boxes with beautiful flowers year round

Woodlawn, the Bronx, New York---narrow streets, some are only 24 feet from curb to curb, parking on both sides of the street, feel of a small town, well kept flower gardens in residential areas, well kept store fronts, main shops, streets, offices, restaurants, pubs mix in with Public School 19, Woodlawn Heights Library, two banks, Post Office, train station, apartments above shops all within walking distance, all needed supplies are available in the area, clean up days, street fairs

Metuchen, New Jersey ---walking town, two lane street, parallel parking on both sides of street, this creates a shield for pedestrians from vehicles, traditional street lights, conveniently placed benches, rows of trees

West Chester, Pennsylvania---diversified, compact community, walk everywhere for shopping and errands, residential houses within walking distance to center of town,

To create a great place you need:

Small streets more for walking than driving

Town squares

Strong commercial centers with a mix of activities

A down to earth scale

Friendly to bicycles

Traditional local celebrations

Public markets
Diagonal parking
Sidewalk cafes
A transit station or stop that is easy to walk to in the center of town
Trees and flowers
An involved community

If a street is to become a convenient and enjoyable place, it must be looked at holistically. The street must be a distinctive environment with many different interrelated elements reflecting the character, needs and aspirations of a particular community. The street must have spaces, squares and gathering places, restaurants and pubs, public markets, vendors, amenities –places to sit, flowers, public art, attractive signs, lighting, trash receptacles, public clocks, bicycle racks, fountains, bus shelters

Streets are places for people to walk, stroll, look, gaze, meet, play, shop, and even work, alongside, but not dominated by, cars.

Calming and great places can be created by implementing;

Diagonal parking
Converting one-way streets to two-way streets
Widening sidewalks, narrowing streets and traffic lanes
Bulbs, bulbouts, bumpouts, chokers, curbs extensions, neckdowns
Chicans—roads that narrow and curve
Roundabouts
Traffic circles
Raised medians
Tight corner radii—sidewalk space on the street area to be visible to traffic
Diverter—physical barriers that redirect traffic-- such as a landscaped or bricked triangle in the road
Road humps
Rumble strips

Transit should be looked at both in terms of determining how it fits in relation to where traffic calming improvements need to be installed, and in terms of how transit and traffic calming reinforce one another as ways to encourage people to get from place to place without driving. Transit plays an important peacemaking role by spurring the kinds of people-friendly, business and community building activities that help rejuvenate places.

Where do you find the funds?----- public and private sources

Some suggestions include:

Revenue dedication
Special Improvement Districts—taxes assessed
Foundation and Grants
Adoption and Own-A-Piece

ISTEA and SAFETEA-LU --Federal Government Safe, Accountable, Flexible,
Efficient, Transportation Equity Act
Local improvements project and leveraging of funds