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By applying a traditional sense of design, communities are becoming less expansive and more efficient. 

There Goes the Neighborhood

By Nicole Holland
As adaptable as we are, humans have resided in a multitude of environments: underground, on water, in communes and even as hermits. Our diverse habitation varies with desire, opportunity and circumstance, evolving as needs and wants dictate. And once again, we find that our nest is changing. Today's architects and planners who drew from the quality of life created pre-World War II have envisioned a new pattern of development.

With roots in environmental sustainability, the movement known as New Urbanism burst on the scene in the late 1980s/early '90s and has recently begun to transform the modern city. With this movement, cities are becoming more compact and accessible, neighborhoods more diverse, homes more accommodating. With a sensibility of features, developers and architects laud such developments for their livability, and residents are migrating to this new domain to escape suburbia and find a community with a conscience.

To visualize the development, one only has to look back at an early- to mid-20th century downtown Main Street: a centralized stretch of commerce with residences perched above each retail building. Following World War II, however, progress forced cities outward. Rural land became urban developments, and because housing was less expensive outside the city, families relocated and suburban living became praxis. "People moved to the promises of a suburb," said Marianne Cusato, principal of Cusato Cottages LLC, New York, N.Y. These clean, new, spacious neighborhoods have recently begun to transform the modern city. With this move, cities are becoming more compact and accessible, neighborhoods more diverse, homes more accommodating. With a sensibility of features, developers and architects laud such developments for their livability, and residents are migrating to this new domain to escape suburbia and find a community with a conscience.

The synergy of home life and the natural environment is enhanced by comfortable outdoor spaces. New Urbanism facilitates interaction through elements such as spacious sidewalks and, here, a life-sized chess board.

Often referred to as traditional development, New Urbanism integrates multifamily buildings within livable communities. These neighborhoods contiguously intermix shopping, restaurants and entertainment with both a residential and commercial component. "You're emplusing less land to build the same number of houses than you would compared to a conventional development," Maun said. The compact development is designed to establish a degree of connection for its residents. "A great deal of emphasis is put on good public parks and open space or park space within the New Urbanist design—a more usable space for the community."

Accessible street patterns, prevalent pedestrian thoroughfares and easy-to-access neighborhoods with fewer cul-de-sacs tie the development together. This accommodating urban plan creates distinctive, inviting areas, such as small courtyards and nearby parks, to foster a sense of community for inhabitants.

The movement can be implemented in various stages of a city's life span—from the initial establishment of a development to redeveloping entire communities. Existing communities may incorporate a process called infill development, which transforms outdated or unused areas into new communities. Take East Beach, for example. Created by the development team of LeylandAlliance LLC in collaboration with architect Andres Duany of Miami-based Duany Plattenkamp, this comprehensive design plan is changing. Today's architects and planners who drew from the quality of life created pre-World War II have envisioned a new pattern of development.

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New Urban development in the San Francisco, Beach, look no further than Santana Row. A mixed-use project 100 acres of a distressed neighborhood into a mixed-use community.

For information about some of the leading New Urbanism proponents, visit: Duany Plater-Zyberk & Co. www.dpz.com

Resources:

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Marana Cuesta LLC www.cuestaestates.com

LeylandAlliance www.leylandalliance.com

SB Architects www.db-architects.com

Plater-Zyberk & Co., East Beach is a 700-residential-unit community on the Chesapeake Bay. The Norfolk, Va., infill project redevelops 100 acres of a distressed neighborhood into a mixed-use community.

The master plan developed an entirely new, simple-to-navigate street grid, creating walkways for entry garages. Fully grown trees, previously hidden in backyards, became integrated into public park systems. The inclusion of green space enhances the neighborhood, each area is furnished with benches, landscaping and lighting. These spaces provide a domain for social gatherings and lawn activities.

Each East Beach home will be typically less than one-eighth an acre for each lot, providing adequate living space juxtaposed with the landscape, while a mixed-use town center, located in an easily accessible area, provides additional commerce.

As a guest or resident moves west to east, the dynamic of the neighborhood evolves. The west side features commercial buildings, while the west is home to quieter, residential areas. North and south running streets lead to the bay, providing public access to the beach.

For a west coast comparable to East Beach, look no further than Santana Row. A New Urban development in the San Francisco, Bay Area, Santana Row is a mixed-use project that replaced an antiquated, mid-20th-century shopping mall. In exchange for the expansive parking lot and silicified structure, John Eller, principal and president of SB Architects in San Francisco, designed the community to facilitate an array of activities. The design of the streets—like many New Urban neighborhood—are narrow, which encourages walking and bicycling and reduces the reliance on motorized transportation. "[The project] is designed in a way to entice and enrich the environment," Eller said. "Residential and retail are synergistic."

One of the strongest attributes of New Urbanist developments such as these is a walkable network? That’s very, very important." Maun said. "Is there an inclusion of rental apartment developments boasts fewer features of the movement than others, while others incorporate additional components. "You have to look at each project individually on its merits and see. What are they trying to achieve?" Maun said. "Is there an inclusion of rental apartments? Are the developments to walkable urban development, seen here in the form of locally grown produce, is an important aspect of New Urbanist development design."

By 2020, the movement is projected to reach most metropolitan areas across the nation. "Most large, metro areas will have 10 to 15 areas similar to a downtown," Lineberger projected. "There will be an emergence of regional walkable urban places. The majority of development dollars will be spent there. These walkable urban developments will be seen in downtowns, uptowns and in town centers throughout a metropolitan area. They say less is more, and these compactly designed developments are opening new doors for residents and broadening the horizons for a new generation of habitation."