



# Complete Neighborhoods A Guidebook

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# Acknowledgements

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An aerial photograph of a city street, likely in Oslo, Norway, showing a dense urban environment with many buildings and a central pedestrian street. A semi-transparent yellow rectangular overlay is positioned across the upper portion of the image, containing the text "Executive Summary" in white. The street below is filled with people walking, and the surrounding buildings have various rooflines and colors, including grey, blue, and white. A prominent clock tower is visible in the upper right background.

# Executive Summary

# Executive Summary

Have you ever felt like something is missing in your neighborhood? Perhaps as you drive home from the grocery store -- stuck in traffic and surrounded by a hundred other cars -- it still feels like there's not a person in sight. And it's no wonder. Who would want to walk or bike with all this traffic, and how would you get where you need to go when there aren't sidewalks in many places anyway? You might as well stay home!

But our streets were meant to be so much more than just a means of traveling from home to work... work to errands... errands to dinner... and back home again. The Complete Neighborhood concept is one that re-balances streets in favor of people and seeks to restore the closeness of urban life as it began in cities thousands of years ago. The idea is simple and really nothing new: we should have everything we need within a short and safe 15- or 20-minute walk or bike ride of home and office. There should be plenty of options for shopping and dining, and there should be no space wasted. And, if and when things are farther away, we should be able to hop on a bus or train just as quickly and conveniently as taking our own car!

And even with gas and oil prices rising year after year, our cars are more costly than they seem. Because of regulations about the way neighborhoods are designed, they have been shaped around the personal vehicle as the de facto way of life -- even knowing that not everyone has the opportunity to own and/or use a car! Those who are very old or very young, disabled, poor, or otherwise historically disadvantaged in terms of race, ethnicity, or citizenship status often bear the brunt of the pain and misfortune caused by cars. These "social costs" are at times hard to quantify in dollars, but the effects are shared among the entire community regardless of how they travel or how much money they earn. Health issues like obesity, heart disease, and asthma; crash-related injuries and deaths; environmental pollution and climate change; traffic and congestion; and infrastructure and maintenance

costs are all consequential to the car and the way we've built neighborhoods to accommodate them. And while we can make our communities better by taking a step away from a life dominated by cars, the goal is never to restrict mobility or access. A *Complete Neighborhood* gives back the freedom of choice and accessibility that we've been missing!

This paper provides a checklist of all the things a community needs to become complete. The practices and studies within are intended to assist municipal governments and their citizens in promoting walkability, social cohesion, transit-access, equity and diversity, economic opportunity, and more in their neighborhoods. We'll cover topics such as:

- Using **SUPPORTIVE DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS** to allow and incentivize denser residential and commercial development
- Providing **ACCESS TO A MIX OF SHOPS, JOBS, HOMES, AND RECREATION** in close proximity to community members
- **FILLING IN THE GAPS** to transform empty lots and buildings into community-wide assets
- Developing a plan for **PARKING REFORM** to utilize space for people -- not just cars
- Prioritizing **WALKING AND BIKING** for safe, affordable, efficient, healthy, and environmentally friendly trips
- Exercising **PEDESTRIAN-SCALE STREET DESIGN & ARCHITECTURE** in areas of development that are both safer and more pleasing to the eye
- Encouraging **NEIGHBORHOOD VITALITY & RESILIENCE** through recreation and face-to-face socialization
- Devising **EQUITABLE DESIGN & POLICY** guidelines for people of all ages, colors, abilities, and backgrounds and addressing the diverse needs of disadvantaged groups

- Responding to community concerns and building trust through active **PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT**
- **FUNDING** cost-effective and innovative projects that advance the goals of a community

These concepts may, at first glance, seem unachievable. It will certainly take time and dedication to uproot the norms of automobility and the built environment as it currently is. In the end, however, a Complete Neighborhood will better serve its residents in all areas of life. Go ahead and start checking off where your community currently stands and what still needs to be done!

### **Frequently Asked Questions:**

#### **What's so special about a Complete Neighborhood?**

The Complete Neighborhood concept is not really all that revolutionary – it is a return to the fundamentals of community planning. A Complete Neighborhood offers personalized and human-centered mobility solutions, avoiding “one-size-fits-all” perspectives when determining levels of walkability and accessibility.

#### **Why do we need Complete Neighborhoods?**

Designing neighborhoods almost exclusively to meet the needs of drivers has exacerbated what we call “urban sprawl.” By allowing development to spread out far beyond the natural boundaries of a city, we have become dependent on the car to get around in our daily lives. But where does that leave people unable to afford the costs of owning and maintaining a vehicle of their own? Or people who are too young or old to drive? A Complete Neighborhood makes sure amenities like grocery stores, hospitals and doctor’s offices, restaurants, parks and recreation centers, churches, and schools are accessible by everyone. Plus, walking, biking, and other forms of active transportation are cheaper, safer, healthier, and more environmentally conscious than cars!

#### **How does a Complete Neighborhood impact traffic?**

The Complete Neighborhood concept is never intended to restrict movement within or between cities. But by making it safer, easier, and more fun to walk, bike, or use public transit, we hope to offer residents new choices and empower people to decide for themselves how best to get around with or without access to a car. This means fewer cars on the roads and less congestion.

#### **How does a Complete Neighborhood address equity issues?**

The Complete Neighborhood concept is always about bringing communities together no matter their race, age, ability, or status. This is why it’s so important to incorporate minority voices when developing an action plan tailored to the specific needs of a community. Equitable projects may include making sidewalks and crosswalks more accessible to those with disabilities or building affordable housing near existing transit stations. A Complete Neighborhood works to undo social and physical barriers that isolate and segregate people based on where and how they live.

#### **Is a city ever truly “complete”?**

Perhaps not! Cities are, by definition, ever expanding centers of culture, learning, and economic opportunity, and while the Complete Neighborhood concept works to utilize space efficiently and effectively at the neighborhood-level, there’s always room for growth!

# Introduction



# Introduction

Our communities -- having been increasingly built around the automobile -- are costing us more than we think. But as we're driving along, windows down at 40 miles per hour, and headed to work or the grocery store, it's easy to overlook exactly how much we've sacrificed to move traffic. In fact, we rationalize the cost of such convenience and freedom as just another bill to pay. Oil changes, car payments, tanks of gas -- how else could we get around anyway?

Even though they can be hard to quantify in dollars, there exist enormously expensive societal costs, or externalities, for every trip made by car.<sup>1,2</sup> The costs we personally incur as drivers are just the tip of the iceberg, and research in this area has identified dozens of negative externalities over the years. These include health problems like obesity and heart disease, climate change and pollution, infrastructure maintenance and construction, traffic congestion, and crash-related injuries and death.<sup>1,2</sup> For a single person over a period of years, these social costs can far exceed the price of the car and all its maintenance, insurance fees, and taxes combined.<sup>1,2</sup> For a community where cars are the norm, the effects are multiplied, and the costs unfairly shifted onto the people who don't even use or own one for themselves.<sup>3</sup> And the more a community focuses on automobility in terms of its design and governance, the more inequitable it becomes and the further away it gets from what a truly Complete Neighborhood can and should be.

## What is a Complete Neighborhood?

Our cities were meant to be so much more than just places to own a home or travel between for work. The Complete Neighborhood concept is one that transcends the auto-dependence of the modern age and seeks to restore the closeness of urban life. A Complete Neighborhood is all about having necessities like grocery stores, churches, and schools close at hand -- often within a 15- or 20-minute walk or bike ride. As it stands today, the ability to choose walking, biking, or taking a bus in

addition to using personal vehicles is something that most communities in the US are lacking. But through urban design and policy, a Complete Neighborhood promotes walkability, social cohesion, transit-access, equity and diversity, economic opportunity, and more.

Research concerning the effects of cars on our health, environment, social networks, and economy is widespread and overwhelmingly negative; with the right plan, however, we can offset and perhaps even eliminate some of these social costs. For instance, a Complete Neighborhood plan encourages varied and affordable development of businesses and housing in close proximity to the things we need so that we don't have to spend our precious time in traffic. It transforms wasted space and empty parking lots into amenities worth enjoying; it fosters friendship and compassion between neighbors in good times and bad; and it safeguards the welfare of residents of all ages, races, and abilities. And, while the idea is to reduce our everyday reliance on cars, the goal is never to take people's keys away or restrict people in place. This guidebook and the practices within are a testament to the freedom of choice and accessibility that we've been missing in our communities: this is how to build a Complete Neighborhood.

A Complete Neighborhood is **MORE**:

- Varied, compact, and affordable
- Economical and purposeful in space
- Active, healthier, and safer
- Vibrant, lively, and green
- Environmentally friendly and resilient
- Accessible, equitable, and diverse
- Informed and democratic
- Financially responsible



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# Supportive Development Regulations



# Supportive Development Regulations

City planners across the US utilize a plethora of tools to manage orderly growth within cities. Zoning and ordinances are two tool sets that are crucial for this management process. These tools are foundational elements of how a community is built. The built environment determines where community services and amenities are located and how easy it is for the community to access them. Different types of zoning that can be found in communities across the US can be seen in Figure 1. This image visualizes how each of these types of zoning influences the built environment.



Figure 1. Zoning requirements shape a community in drastically different ways (Source: Form-Based Codes Institute)

Historically, communities have utilized a land-use zoning approach to managing their community's built environment. Land-use zoning divides a community into different areas, and these areas are permitted to utilize only one form of land use. Common land uses within a community include industrial, agricultural, residential, or open space. These land uses have set regulations pertaining to what the built environment can look like within these areas. Regulations within these areas are often referred to as zoning codes.

Land-use zoning does have many strengths in that it is a technique for orderly growth management for cities. On the other hand, the zoning codes for land-use zoning are oftentimes broad and promote only one form of use for a large area. In doing so, communities may not have services and amenities within an easily accessible distance. And as such, many community members will face barriers in

accessing their workplaces, grocery stores, and much more without a motorized vehicle.<sup>1</sup> One way that these barriers can be addressed is to begin adopting form-based zoning within communities.

Form-based zoning is a technique that has the ability to be more impactful to initiatives like Complete Neighborhoods. The Form-Based Code Institute defines form-based code as, "a land development regulation that fosters predictable built results and a high-quality public realm by using physical form (rather than separation of uses) as the organizing principle for the code."<sup>2</sup> This definition highlights how form-based code focuses more on the built environment's detail of a community and not the land uses of a community. Many areas within the US have older parts of their communities that had similar types of regulations. These areas are often downtown districts, neighborhood hubs, and other versions of Complete Neighborhoods.<sup>3</sup> These areas often utilize form-based code due to its ability to allow different types of shops, offices, and more to be built next to each other and still preserve an area's character.

An example of what form-based zoning looks like would be the City of Chelan, WA. As seen in Figure 2, the City of Chelan utilizes form-based zoning in their downtown area. In doing so, a zoning code can be created to mirror what a certain city block or land parcel is permitted to be used for. For their downtown, there are areas designated specifically for tourists, downtown activities, and residential areas.

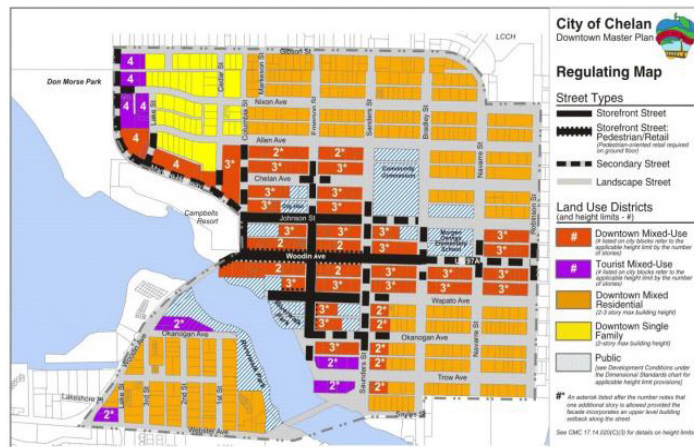


Figure 2. Zoning map of downtown Chelan, Wa. (Source: City of Chelan)

Ordinances are utilized within municipalities to set rules and laws. These ordinances range from where bicyclists are permitted to ride their bikes to designating who manages what within the right-of-way. As cities have continued to grow and evolve, many ordinances become outdated and can act as barriers to present-day issues. To ensure that a Complete Neighborhood meets its full potential, a city's ordinances should be inventoried and reviewed. This process will also

provide insight as to what ordinances may act as a barrier to the successful implementation of a Complete Neighborhood.

Zoning and ordinances continue to lay the foundation for how communities are built, what type of services and amenities can be found within the community, and how these communities are governed. For the successful implementation of a Complete Neighborhood project, form-based zoning and updating ordinances should occur.

### Case Study: Form-Based Zoning in New Rochelle, NY

Like many cities throughout the US, New Rochelle, New York, had historically utilized land-use zoning. This created issues with accessibility to services and amenities within their community as well as them not being as economically competitive as other nearby cities. These issues were persistent until the City of Rochelle moved toward form-based zoning. To initiate this process, the City conducted an engagement process to understand how the community would like their city's built environment to look like. Through this engagement process, the City was able to create a new form-based code that prioritized human-scale walkable development. This was in contrast to the auto-oriented land-use zoning that was already occurring.

## **CHECKLIST:**

- Define Complete Neighborhood boundaries
- Assess current conditions within defined boundaries
- Conduct community outreach programming to define the community's vision for the neighborhood
- Create form-based code based on defined area and community feedback

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

**Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, Form-Based Codes: A Step-by-Step Guide for Communities:** <https://formbasedcodes.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/CMAP-GuideforCommunities.pdf>

**University of Idaho: Building Community across the Rural-to-Urban Transect:** <https://webpages.uidaho.edu/larc453/pdf/transect.pdf>

**Form-based Codes Institute: South Bend Zoning Ordinance:** [https://formbasedcodes.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Driehaus2021\\_CodeDocument\\_SouthBend-2.pdf](https://formbasedcodes.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Driehaus2021_CodeDocument_SouthBend-2.pdf)

**University of Miami Law School: Building by Right - Social Equity Implications of Transitioning to Form-Based Code:** [https://repository.law.miami.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1735&context=fac\\_articles](https://repository.law.miami.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1735&context=fac_articles)

**City of Denver: Zoning Code:** [https://www.denvergov.org/content/dam/denvergov/Portals/646/documents/Zoning/DZC/Complete\\_Denver\\_Zoning\\_Code.pdf](https://www.denvergov.org/content/dam/denvergov/Portals/646/documents/Zoning/DZC/Complete_Denver_Zoning_Code.pdf)

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- 2: Form-Based Codes Defined. (n.d.). Form-Based Code Institute. <https://formbasedcodes.org/definition/>
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SALZBURG

# Better Local Access to Things People Need

# Better Local Access to Things People Need

As cities have grown over time, they have expanded out from traditional city centers where most amenities were readily accessible by walking, biking, or transit. Suburban neighborhoods were developed further and further away, under land use practices that isolated development by its type. Though single-use suburban residential development provided an escape from some of the traffic problems of the city, it also created new problems. Often a car was required for almost every trip due to the distance between the places people lived and their work, shops, and places where they had appointments.

No longer could people walk out of the front door of their house or office and walk to a corner store or restaurant to buy groceries or get a bite to eat. Today life often requires getting in a car to drive to a shopping center with massive parking lots or riding a bus to work or to the hospital on the outskirts of single-family residential developments.

If you examine communities now, you will often find a patchwork of zoning and developments that isolate everything by a single use case. This community framework, originally developed to get people away from polluting factories, has evolved into long commutes for work, shopping or entertainment, massive infrastructure requirements, traffic congestion, large vacant retail/office communities, and long-lasting environmental impacts. And, maybe more significant, there has been a loss in physical activity due to the need to be in a car to get everywhere and the general lack of space available for physical activity. We have also lost our sense of community as there is little opportunity for neighbors to interact.

After facing uncontrolled sprawl and investing in large infrastructure projects that seemingly

meet development demands but often result in a multitude of underutilized buildings, cities have taken a step back to examine how they can create communities that meet the needs of citizens and visitors. As a result, community development concepts like Complete Neighborhoods and activity centers are being examined or implemented. The goal is to revitalize the idea of people living, working, and utilizing amenities within a short walk or bike ride and within a reasonable transit distance.<sup>1</sup>

Mixed-use developments are ideal solutions as they blend two or more uses within one development complex. Mixed land use generally consists of at least a residential component, with retail and restaurants, and often it will also incorporate offices and other services, like government services. Mixed land use allows for more compact development -- often reducing the amount of parking required as most parking is shared -- as well as providing more connections via walking, biking, or transit.<sup>2</sup> This isn't to say that everything is constructed within one block, but more so within a 15- or 20-minute walk or bike ride -- about the time you would spend driving to these things with current development patterns.

It is important to note that while mixed land use promotes compact development, not everything is intended to be built in high-rise buildings. Mixed land use can be either horizontal or vertical. Horizontal is where you have residential structures mixed with retail/office/entertainment or light industrial structures, and vertical is all the uses mixed within the same structures.<sup>2</sup> While vertical mixed land use can be a high-rise building, it is more frequently a low-rise building (up to seven floors), built to create an environment like a town center. Planners utilize activity centers in much the same way as they do mixed land use, with

the exception that the center focus is typically on social activities, shopping, dining, and tourism. An example of a mixed-use development can be seen in figure 3.



Figure 3. An example of Compact, mixed-use development (Source: )

Researchers typically distinguish between mixed land use and activity centers by noting mixed land use focuses on locating home and work near transit, while activity centers are focused on concentrating activities and work within a single facility. While activity centers focus on concentrating work and play, many activity center

developments contain a residential component much like mixed use.<sup>1,3</sup> Mixed land use has existed since we first began developing American towns. They began as main street centers, seen in figure 4, where people lived and operated shops to provide services and supplies, as well as places for the community to gather. Many of these main street communities still exist today, either from continued operation or new development.



Figure 4. Horizontally dense amenities in Livingston, MN. (Source: City of Chelan)



Figure 5. Activity centers in San Antonio's Pearl District

### Case Study: Activity Centers in San Antonio's Pearl District

The City of San Antonio, Texas, like most big cities, has faced the challenges of growth and decline over time. In many communities there are areas throughout the city with buildings or lots that have been vacated as businesses have departed or residents have been attracted to the suburbs. As a revitalization measure, San Antonio has identified 13 areas for activity center development. The Pearl District is the most recent example of mixed land use and activity center concepts. The Pearl District, seen in figure 5, is in a former industrial area that once housed Texas's largest brewery. Keeping some of the industrial buildings intact, the area was redeveloped to include residential housing, a hotel, restaurants, shops, and office spaces. The concept was built around open, public spaces where there are concerts, farmers markets, and other community events. The Pearl District functions as a mixed-use community for many residents, while it is also functions as an activity center for residents in outlying communities or tourists visiting San Antonio.



Both mixed land use and activity centers provide communities with the opportunity to take advantage of existing infrastructure by capitalizing on infill or brownfield development. These concepts often replace existing vacant buildings or repurpose existing buildings, reducing the need for the locality to expand expensive infrastructure.<sup>1,2</sup> Quite frequently, these locations are already near transit options, and have adequate transportation infrastructure. Additionally, they may already be laid out in a way that reduces the need for cars and encourages walking or biking. Capitalizing on mixed land use and activity centers for infill or brownfield development also allows for increasing and diversification of the tax base within the community. See the next section for more information on infill development for the purpose of building Complete Neighborhoods.

### **CHECKLIST:**

- Incorporate more mixed-use zoning and development into comprehensive planning
- Develop parking requirements supportive of mixed-use zoning and compact development
- Review current transportation and street plans to identify opportunities to incorporate pedestrian and bike friendly components to align with mixed-use communities
- Develop activity and community space requirements for new developments to support community activity programs and outdoor markets
- Develop re-use ordinances to encourage redevelopment of vacant properties into new housing or uses, as well as constructing new developments over existing parking lot properties

### **Additional Resources:**

**Successful Mixed-Use Development – 7 Brilliant Ideas:** <https://assetsamerica.com/mixed-use-development-ideas/#:~:text=A%20Northern%20Virginia%20mixed%2Dused,homes%2C%20retail%20and%20commercial%20space.>

**10 Urban Projects That Nail Mixed-Use Design:** [https://www.multifamilyexecutive.com/design-development/10-urban-projects-that-nail-mixed-use-design\\_o](https://www.multifamilyexecutive.com/design-development/10-urban-projects-that-nail-mixed-use-design_o)

**Exploring the World of Mixed-Use Development:** <https://www.matthews.com/thought-leadership-mixed-use-development/>

**Complete Communities Toolbox:** <https://www.completecommunitiesde.org/planning/landuse/mixed-use-development/>

Why “activity centers” are the building blocks of inclusive regional economies: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-future-of-the-inclusive-economy-is-in-activity-centers/>

Identifying Activity Centers: A How-To Guide: <https://www.planning.org/publications/document/9268642/>

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# Filling in the Gaps



# Filling in the Gaps

Complete Neighborhoods are meant to bring the things people need closer to home. In doing so many of the transportation barriers to access these services and amenities will be addressed. One way to break down these barriers is by promoting infill development. Infill development is when currently empty lots or underutilized spaces like some parking lots are developed to meet a greater community need.<sup>1</sup>

Infill development can occur in many different types of spaces within a community. These areas include residential, commercial, brownfield, mixed-use, and green spaces.<sup>2</sup> For example, Figure 6 shows an empty lot that could be built upon to fit the use of the buildings on either side of it. In this example, the newly constructed building could be a mixed-use building, like the white building, or residential like the brick building. Another option for this unutilized lot would be to place a service or amenity that the community needs. As this example shows, there are a lot of options for how an unutilized lot can be developed. To ensure that the development is the most impactful, an analysis of what services and amenities are missing from the community should be conducted.



Figure 6. Image of empty lot that can be used for infill development (Source: Raimond Spekking)

To conduct an analysis of underutilized or empty lots within a neighborhood, the community should determine what lots are currently built upon or being utilized. In doing so, the community will understand what percentage of the land within the community is being utilized and what areas can be further developed.

After researching what lots are available for further development within the Complete Neighborhood, another analysis should occur to understand what services and amenities are currently available. Once the current services and amenities offered within the neighborhood are collected, the community can better understand what gaps in services and amenities are occurring.

## Case Study: Economic Benefits of Infill Development in Nashville, TN

In 2013, the organization “Smart Growth America” conducted a study in the City of Nashville, TN. This study identified the savings that could occur by doing infill development versus outlying development. To conduct this study the analysis looked at three areas of development. These areas included a conventional subdivision, a development in an undeveloped lot, and a mixed-use development in the urban core. What this study found was that the development that was in an undeveloped lot outperformed the other two types of development economically. It generated \$115,000 in net revenue per acre. The other locations generated 1,150 times less net revenue per acre than the infill development location.

Once the analysis for what gaps in services and amenities are occurring in the community, public engagement should occur to understand what is currently happening with these properties and what the community would like to see in those locations. This feedback can then lead into the development of form-based zoning within the Complete Neighborhood or reaching out to the property owners of these vacant lots to see what next steps can occur to create infill development.<sup>3</sup>

Infill development plays a vital role in providing services and amenities to communities when further expansion of the Complete Neighborhood is not possible. By having vacant lots or underutilized areas, the community can work with property owners to see what the possible steps would be to develop that land for vital services and amenities needed by the community.

## **CHECKLIST:**

- Inventory all lots that are currently not being utilized within the Complete Neighborhood area
- Analyze what services are currently within the Complete Neighborhood boundaries
- After analysis, engage with the community to see what infill locations would best suit the community based on services that are needed
- Begin creating form-based zoning for this area to match community input and the Complete Neighborhood vision

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

**Smart Growth America: New analysis of Nashville area development reveals opportunity for public savings:** <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/new-analysis-of-nashville-area-development-reveals-opportunity-for-public-savings/>

**Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington: Infill Development:** <https://mrsc.org/explore-topics/planning/development-types-and-land-uses/infill-development#:~:text=Recommended%20Resources-,Overview,the%20normal%20course%20of%20urbanization.>

**Center for Urban Policy Research: Infill Development Standards and Policy Guide:** [https://www.nj.gov/dca/divisions/codes/alerts/pdfs/2006\\_6\\_rev2007\\_4\\_infill\\_dev\\_stds.pdf](https://www.nj.gov/dca/divisions/codes/alerts/pdfs/2006_6_rev2007_4_infill_dev_stds.pdf)

**United States of America Environmental Protection Agency: Attracting Infill Development in Distressed Communities: 30 Strategies:** [https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2015-05/documents/fresno\\_final\\_report\\_042215\\_508\\_final.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2015-05/documents/fresno_final_report_042215_508_final.pdf)

**Lincoln Policy Institute: Gentle Infill - Boomtowns are Making Room for Skinny Homes, Granny Flats, and Other Affordable Housing:** <https://www.lincolninst.edu/sites/default/files/pubfiles/gentle-infill-lla180103.pdf>

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2: Infill and redevelopment. (n.d.). University of Delaware. <https://www.completecommunitiesde.org/planning/landuse/infill-and-redevelopment/>

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An aerial photograph of a large parking lot filled with cars. A yellow semi-transparent rectangular overlay is positioned in the upper-left quadrant of the image. Inside this overlay, the text 'Reclaiming Parking Spaces' is written in a white, bold, sans-serif font. The parking lot below shows rows of cars in various colors (blue, white, red, black, green) parked in designated spaces. Some areas of the lot are empty, and there are some construction-related structures and equipment visible in the background.

# Reclaiming Parking Spaces

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You do not have to look far in any community to find vast open spaces covered by parking lots serving large shopping centers and big-box stores or consuming space along roadways in front of shopping districts. Minimum parking requirements seem to be one of the few elements that can be found in any development regardless of which community you are in. Communities set aside large amounts of space to accommodate masses of people that are never in one location at one time anyway. These requirements were borne from a reaction to the growth of automobile ownership where it was anticipated that regardless of alternative modes of transportation most people would prefer to drive.

Consider a shopping center on a main road with transit available, bordered by residential communities within a reasonable distance. The developer is provided with, at best, a minimum requirement of spaces based on a formula that considers the square footage of the building and potential number of people that could be in occupancy at any given time.<sup>1,2</sup> This does not consider that people could be sharing a ride, walking, or biking to the store, or even utilizing transit that drops them off right in front of the shopping center. Consider that a shopping center could consist of two big-box stores built next to each other. Both would have their own minimum parking requirements based on their potential occupancy, leading both developers to construct large parking lots rather than sharing one lot.

Growth in automobile ownership was not the only influence for developing parking requirements -- where cars were being parked also played a role. Absent the large lots that exist today, drivers would resort to parking along curbs in front of businesses, along roadsides, and in residential areas neighboring retail centers. This led to congested roadways and congested pedestrian

spaces and bikeways in front of storefronts as well as congested residential neighborhoods. In the face of pressure to improve pedestrian safety and placate angry citizens, parking requirements were created to require developers to accommodate parking on site. Unfortunately, parking requirements are developed for the busiest time of day for each business and not for the potential of shared lots based on the different operating hours of the businesses.



Figure 7a. Minimum parking requirements create large parking lots at strip malls like the one pictured above.

Parking can be a significant hurdle to development, particularly the development of Complete Neighborhoods. Requirements for minimum parking have led to more urban sprawl as they increase the size of developments, driving development further away from city centers and residential neighborhoods. As urban sprawl increases, it increases the need for car ownership, which may not be possible for everyone. When not everyone has access to cars, there is a greater demand to provide reliable public transportation such as bus or rail service. As urban sprawl and car use increases so too does the need for more infrastructure.<sup>2</sup> Growth away from the city centers increases the need for extending road and utility networks, that will themselves eventually have to be increased as they become outgrown. Extending infrastructure networks is not a one-time expense,



as it must be maintained and even expanded as roads do when congestion becomes too great. Initial infrastructure costs can be passed on to the developer; however, the long-term expenses of maintenance and expansion fall to the locality.

Developers can keep developments compact and meet parking requirements without creating large lots that consume acres of land; however, it requires the construction of parking garages. In this scenario, the developer may be trading the expense of expanding infrastructure for the expense of constructing garages. Even if they are not trading one expense for another, they are still incurring a significant expense that will increase the cost of construction. The developer then has some options: cancel the project due to cost, charge for parking either at the entrance or through the rents, or obtain an agreement where the locality will absorb the cost of construction of the garages.<sup>2</sup> In one form or another, the community suffers as a result. Either they lose out on much needed housing, services, and retail due to project cancellations, or they bear the cost of the parking expense through direct fees or higher costs of goods and services.

Many communities are currently faced with vacant buildings and spaces that are prime for infill or brownfield development. These are opportunities for developers to aid in revitalizing parts of communities that may have been vacated over time and rejuvenate spaces to provide more housing, retail, services, and employment opportunities. However, they are often hampered by parking requirements. Because these spaces are turned into new uses, they must meet parking requirements for those uses, which may not be possible within the space of the building. This could potentially require developers to seek out lots nearby where they can create the needed parking to meet requirements, again leading to sprawl or the reduction of space available for public use.<sup>1,3</sup> Developers may decide it is more beneficial or cost-effective to build elsewhere, leaving the community with vacant spaces and no tax revenue from those spaces. Residential

communities have even utilized parking requirements to prevent development. This occurs frequently when communities want to keep developers from developing affordable housing or commercial development nearby. The tactic is to identify that minimum requirements exist and there is no way the developer can meet them with the property they want to utilize. The request for the development is either denied or the developer moves to another location.

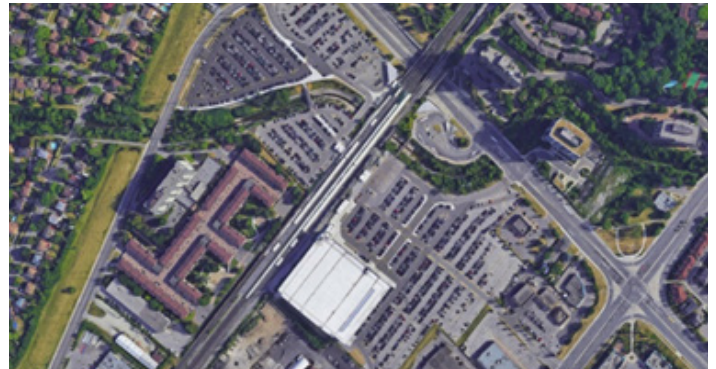


Figure 7b. Minimum parking requirements create large parking lots at shopping centers like the one pictured above.

Parking is an important consideration in Complete Neighborhoods as it will still be needed either because those living there will still need cars to travel to other areas or people from other communities may be coming into the neighborhood for services, entertainment, or shopping. However, it should be considered in a way that allows for safe pedestrian spaces, low- to no impact on community spaces, and the capitalization of existing infrastructure. Allowing the elimination of on-street parking in front of buildings provides the opportunity for markets and shops to create outdoor spaces to extend their business, creates pedestrian safe spaces as it increases walkways and reduces traffic in the corridor, and allows for integration of bike use, which can increase the number of people that can come into the development from nearby communities. Additionally, open spaces that historically would have been parking lots can now be developed as parks or open spaces for community events and activities like concerts or farmers markets. Another option that does not eliminate the large lot but does allow for providing

an inviting storefront or activity space in front of retail space, would be to move the building to the front property line and construct the parking lot behind the building. While this does not eliminate large lots, it does allow for pedestrian friendly storefronts and combined use of parking lots.

All is not lost when it comes to parking and Complete Neighborhoods, as there are several solutions. One easy solution is the use of shared parking to meet parking needs. Not all businesses will be operating at the same time, and if they do, they will rarely meet the maximum demand planners focus on when creating requirements. Shared parking will allow for smaller lots to accommodate multiple businesses, keeping development compact. If a community would rather keep minimums to ensure there is at least enough to accommodate a smaller number of patrons at a certain time, a percentage of spaces could be added above the minimum that would provide a few more spaces rather than the traditional minimum. Another option is to adopt parking maximums. A community may set parking maximums based on use groups, thereby creating smaller lots while encouraging the use of other modes of transportation like cycling. Finally, consideration should be given to parking pricing, charging for either on-street parking or parking lot usage. This not only discourages the use of cars but also provides a revenue stream for the

community that can be utilized for improvements within the district. Figure 8 shows how parking minimums consume space, resulting in less building and street frontages in the before picture. Eliminating parking minimums reduces the overall space consumed by parking and creates more building space as well as space for streetscaping.

Developers of Complete Neighborhoods should also consider proximity to transit, as it provides additional opportunities for people outside the community to come into the community for employment, shopping, entertainment, or services, without having to drive and park a car. Additionally, there may be opportunities to provide for transportation within the district through the use of local circulator transit. Parking lots can be located away from the district with smaller buses transporting pedestrians to various locations – a practice reminiscent of the trams and trolleys of large hospitals or theme parks. Localities should evaluate existing parking requirements to identify opportunities to allow for car usage, while simultaneously minimizing the need for a car, controlling sprawl, increasing infill development, and providing for safe, compact communities. All these considerations lead to compact development, safer pedestrian spaces, and lower costs for development.<sup>1-3</sup>



Figure 8. Re-purposing existing parking to better utilize available space.

### Case Study: Improving Housing by Improving Parking in Boston, MA

Facing a crisis with affordable housing, the City of Boston eliminated the minimum parking requirements to aid in reducing hurdles for development. The goal was to provide more opportunities for Bostonians to live and work in the city at an affordable cost. The problem was that many of the properties to be developed did not provide enough space for off-street parking, which meant developers had to find sites nearby to meet the requirements, build garages, or scrap projects altogether. The change did not eliminate parking completely -- it merely put the decision in the hands of the developers to determine, based on the residents' needs, how much off-street parking to provide. This change can speed up the construction process and keep costs down as garages, if needed, are minimized or developers do not have to search for lots around the city to create parking lots, particularly if they are near to transit.<sup>4</sup>

## **CHECKLIST:**

- Incorporate bike storage and parking into development plans
- Develop new parking requirements based on maximums, shared use or minimums with a percentage of space added based on use
- Provide incentives to develop underutilized parking lots into new mixed-use developments
- Convert on-street parking to pay for parking and re-invest the revenue into maintenance of the district
- Convert on-street parking into public use areas as an extension of storefronts

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

**Vox Mobility Lab: The High Cost of Free Parking:**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Akm7ik-H\\_7U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Akm7ik-H_7U)

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# Biking and Walking as Real Transportation Options



# Biking and Walking as Real Transportation Options

Complete Neighborhood projects oftentimes are conducted in established neighborhoods. These established neighborhoods are usually more difficult to implement new infrastructure in due to the pre-existing built environment that does not typically include multi-modal accommodations. Pre-existing infrastructure within these communities may also inhibit safe connections throughout the neighborhoods, isolating different communities and making non-motorized transportation users feel unwelcome in the built environment. To create a welcoming and safe environment for all road users, an analysis of infrastructure gaps, connections to community resources, and community feedback on desired infrastructure should be conducted. This analysis will then be able to be utilized by a planning professional to begin developing solutions to where issues are occurring and what type of infrastructure should be implemented that the community will utilize.

In the mid to late 1900s, many communities within the US began building neighborhoods without sidewalks or any pedestrian accommodations.<sup>1</sup> This style of neighborhood was constructed due to these communities' ideal way of transportation being personal vehicles. Due to these neighborhoods not having sidewalks or other types of infrastructure for non-motorized transportation, community members are, to this day, unable to safely access community resources without utilizing a personal motorized vehicle.<sup>2</sup> As this issue has persisted, sidewalk connectivity, lack of right-of-way for non-motorized transportation projects, and general community safety has been impacted. Figure 9 showcases how these neighborhoods have persisted into today. Within this image there is little to no room to go back and construct a sidewalk or other multi-modal accommodations without having to purchase right of way and remove older trees and shrubs.



Figure 9. A street lacking sidewalks and other bicycle accommodations  
(Source: thisisbossi on Flickr)

In recent years, cities have made great strides to connect communities via bike infrastructure. This infrastructure ranges from trails to bike lanes to sharrows. By implementing this type of infrastructure, community members are able to utilize another mode of transportation that is oftentimes more affordable. In doing so, transportation barriers begin to break down as bicycling allows the rider to have a wider range of access than a pedestrian. Figure 10 shows a cycletrack that has been implemented to protect cyclists from motorized traffic and create vital connections throughout a neighborhood and city.



Figure 10. A cycletrak with clear markings  
(Source: National Association of City Transportation Officials)

Another type of infrastructure that has been a focus point for many communities around the country are sidewalks. Due to the persisting sidewalk gaps in certain neighborhoods, many communities have created programs to do sidewalk infill.<sup>3</sup> These programs create a more connected pedestrian transportation network that allows for access to more community services and amenities.

To ensure that there exist proper non-motorized transportation connections throughout a Complete Neighborhood, an inventory of this type of infrastructure should occur. An example of an active transportation audit that could be utilized is the Capitol Region Council of Governments Active Transportation Audit. Within this audit, current streets will be reviewed for bike and pedestrian accommodations.<sup>4</sup> It will allow those conducting the audit to understand what items may be creating barriers for the current active transportation system and how to address them.

Another way to review the developing status of the active transportation system within a neighborhood is the Federal Highway Administration's Guidebook for Developing Pedestrian and Bicycle Performance Measures.<sup>5</sup> This guidebook allows a community to know how to measure the progress that is being made to their active transportation system and understand if they are meeting their set goals. Within this guidebook, there are many different performance measures that a community can utilize to understand their progress. The performance

measures that may be the most helpful for the community to implementing a Complete Neighborhood would be the connectivity index that measures access to community destinations and access to jobs. The other performance measures are also important for communities when implementing a robust bicycle and pedestrian transportation system.

After obtaining the data from the active transportation audit and pedestrian and bicycle performance measures, the community can come together to decide how they would like to proceed in developing their active transportation system. This data can highlight what possible projects could be conducted to address different barriers. Once a list of projects has been created, they should be prioritized in consideration to addressing safety and equity concerns while improving connectivity. This will allow the community to understand when and how these projects will be implemented.

### Case Study: Mobility Action Program in Seattle, WA

In 2019, the City of Seattle created the North Downtown Mobility Action Program. The focus of this plan was to support access and livability in the North Downtown of Seattle. To provide this support, the City of Seattle reviewed planned existing projects, identified ways to improve connectivity, and prioritized potential projects. From this prioritization of potential projects, the city was able to implement projects that had the most impact first. In doing so, connections to community services and amenities were created.

## **CHECKLIST:**

- Conduct an active transportation audit to understand the existing conditions of this infrastructure inside the neighborhood
- Create projects to address issues that were identified within the active transportation audit
- Prioritize projects based on impact on safety, equity, and connectivity
- Incorporate projects into the community's capital improvement program

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

**Capitol Region Council of Governments: Active Transportation Audit:** [https://crocog.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/ActiveTransportationAudit\\_Intersections.pdf](https://crocog.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/ActiveTransportationAudit_Intersections.pdf)

**Montgomery Planning Department: Montgomery County Complete Streets:** <https://montgomeryplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Montgomery-County-CSDG-Approved-2021.pdf>

**St. Paul: Street Design Manual:** <https://www.stpaul.gov/sites/default/files/Media%20Root/Planning%20%26%20Economic%20Development/Street%20Design%20Manual%20Final101416.pdf>

**Federal Highway Administration: Guidebook for Developing Pedestrian and Bicycle Performance Measures:** [https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bicycle\\_pedestrian/publications/performance\\_measures\\_guidebook/pm\\_guidebook.pdf](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bicycle_pedestrian/publications/performance_measures_guidebook/pm_guidebook.pdf)

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An aerial photograph of a city street during a community event. A prominent red-paved bike lane runs diagonally across the frame. Numerous people are seen riding bicycles, some with baskets or panniers. A few individuals are walking on the asphalt. Several orange traffic cones are placed along the edges of the bike lane. In the upper left, a group of people is gathered near a red and white striped umbrella. The overall scene depicts a vibrant, active urban environment.

# Streets for People



# Streets for People

Over the years, there have been varying approaches to designing streets. The earliest streets were meant to get pedestrians to local markets, residential areas, and workplaces. A pedestrian-focused street design was heavily utilized up until the beginning of the 20th century. The change in street design was due to the creation of the automobile.<sup>1</sup> During this change in street design, streets became roads intended to allow single-passenger motorized vehicles to access all areas within a city in as little time as possible. At the same time as roadways took on a motorized vehicle focus, urban sprawl began to occur across the US. The coupling of urban sprawl and development of auto-oriented suburbs began the US's reliance on motorized vehicles. The ramifications of this style of street design and land use are still being felt to this day. One result of street design taking on an auto-centric focus is the rising pedestrian fatalities due to motorized vehicles. The repercussion of focusing on vehicles versus pedestrian safety is that 7,508 pedestrians died in 2022. This would equal 20 people every day being killed by a motorized vehicle just by walking in the US. The US is currently experiencing a 41 year high in motorized vehicle-related pedestrian deaths and serious injuries.<sup>2</sup>

For the past several decades, roadways have been overbuilt to allow for a higher capacity and high levels of traffic throughput. This overbuilding influences drivers both knowingly and unknowingly to utilize the roadway in unsafe ways. When roadways are overbuilt to have wide lanes and large setbacks of trees and buildings, it encourages high speeds. Without the feeling of constraint, drivers are more likely to drive at excessive speeds. This often occurs on rural roadways but still occurs in urban areas. To combat speeding, communities can right-size roadways and create vertical constraints.<sup>3</sup>

There are several ways to address the overbuilding of roadways in the US. Road diets have been a highly successful technique to right-size roadways; for instance, communities can convert four lanes of traffic to three and/or reduce lane widths. By reducing lanes of traffic, there is the opportunity to implement multi-modal facilities along the roadway and slow traffic speeds. In addition to promoting the safe use of bikes, these improvements improve pedestrian and driver safety. This style of road diet is a budget-friendly approach to addressing America's overbuilt roadways through simple restriping. Although road diets are highly successful, they should only be utilized when the amount of motorized traffic on the roadway would not drastically impact the flow of traffic. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) suggests that roadways with current and future average daily traffic counts below 25,000 vehicles should undergo road diets.<sup>4</sup>

Another way that a roadway can implement infrastructure that protects pedestrians and bicyclists is by implementing a comprehensive "Complete Streets" policy. The FHWA defines a Complete Street as a "street that is safe, and feels safe, for all users ... streets and networks that prioritize safety, comfort, and connectivity to destinations for all people who use the street network."<sup>5</sup> Put into practice, a Complete Street policy becomes the default approach to street design within a city. In doing so, communities prioritize safety, comfort, and connectivity on all of their transportation network. The FHWA has an online platform that lays out how to approach implementing Complete Street policies. This resource can be found in the additional resources of this section titled "Federal Highway Administration: Complete Streets."

To prevent the issue of overbuilding roadways for the benefit solely of motorized vehicles, changes to design guidelines should be considered. The review of current design guidelines utilized by the community can occur to see where design updates can occur that will promote multi-modal transportation. A resource that could guide the updated design guidelines would be the National Association of City Transportation Officials Urban Street Design Guide. This guide provides a comprehensive overview of different styles of streets that accommodate different levels of motorized vehicles and multi-modal accommodations.<sup>6</sup>

After reviewing these design guidelines, the adoption of more street design guidelines that fit the surrounding neighborhood and transportation system should occur. Many roadways are different than others even though they have the same classification. By having varying design guidelines, more roadways will be able to utilize approved design guidelines set by the community and help improve connectivity and safety within the neighborhood.

Over the last century, roadways have been built for motorized vehicles with other modes of transportation as an afterthought, but by upgrading current roadways to include multimodal facilities and revising the current roadway design guidelines, a Complete Neighborhood can improve safety and connectivity for all roadway users.

### **Design Guidelines: National Association of City Transportation Officials**

One of the leading entities that promotes transportation infrastructure is the National Association of City Transportation Officials. Many of their policies and design guidelines align with the FHWA's design guidelines and manuals. While this case study does not focus on a particular city, this case study does showcase more walkable, safer, and welcoming streets can be created. This design guidebook was created by city transportation officials across the world that have piloted many of these street typologies and seen their success in increasing pedestrian safety and multimodal accessibility.

## **CHECKLIST:**

- Review current design guidelines being utilized for building roadways within the community
- Identify what current design guidelines do not contain pedestrian safety and multimodal focus
- Update street design guidelines to contain pedestrian safety and multimodal aspects

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

**University of Delaware: Complete Neighborhood Toolbox:** <https://www.completecommunitiesde.org/planning/complete-streets/walkable-communities/>

**Global Designing Cities Initiative: Global Street Design Guide:** <https://globaldesigningcities.org/publication/global-street-design-guide/introduction/>

**National Association of City Transportation Officials: Urban Street Design Guide:** <https://nacto.org/publication/urban-street-design-guide/>

**Institute of Transportation Engineers: Design Walkable Urban Thoroughfares - A Context-Sensitive Approach:** <https://www.ite.org/pub/?id=E1CFF43C-2354-D714-51D9-D82B39D4DBAD>

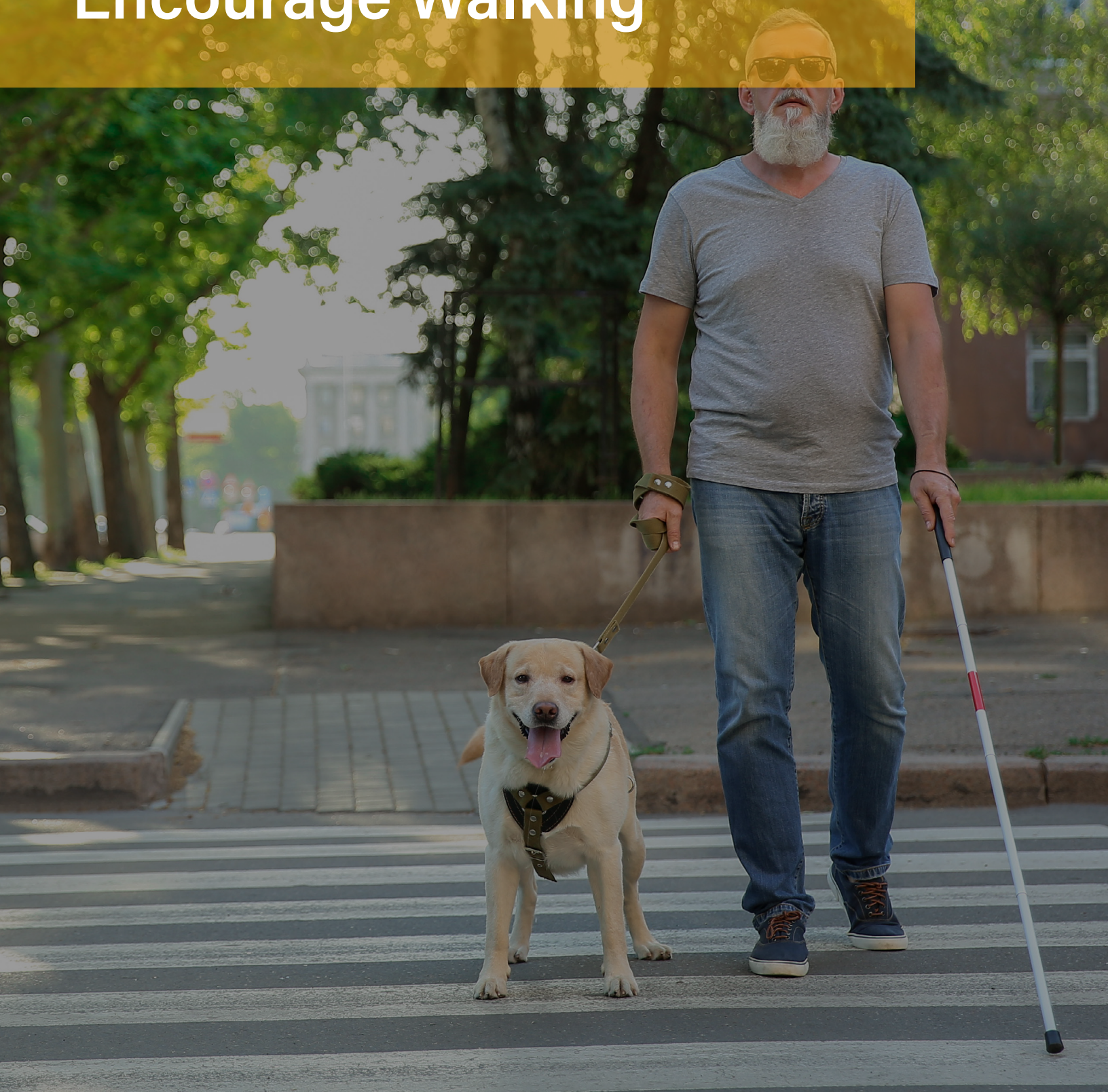
**Montana Department of Transportation: Context Sensitive Solutions Guide:** [https://www.mdt.mt.gov/other/webdata/external/cadd/report\\_templates\\_guidance/css\\_guide.Pdf](https://www.mdt.mt.gov/other/webdata/external/cadd/report_templates_guidance/css_guide.Pdf)

**Federal Highway Administration: Complete Streets:** <https://highways.dot.gov/complete-streets>

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# Streets and Spaces that Encourage Walking



# Streets and Spaces that Encourage Walking

The goal for the Complete Neighborhood concept is to provide amenities, housing, employment, and services within a 15- or 20- minute walk and bike ride and to provide an accessible transit network for the community. For this to be effective, pedestrians, cyclists and transit riders must have safe street environments that are connected throughout the community. This not only means safe spaces to walk and bike, but also safe spaces to gather in. When developing Complete Neighborhoods, communities must not only focus on buildings and their uses, but also must focus on the street design. Designing streets must consider traffic volume, transit access, bike lanes, sidewalks, how long blocks should be to cross, as well as access to storefronts and parking. Everyone can be considered a pedestrian in a Complete Neighborhood, regardless of whether or not they regularly walk or bike within the community. Therefore, designers and planners must consider the pedestrian experience when creating Complete Neighborhoods.

The core of most communities is the street network -- the mechanism for moving people, delivering goods, commuting, or delivering services. While Complete Neighborhoods are also dependent on street network and designs, it takes on a different form. Main streets will typically have fewer lanes for vehicles, and they may or may not provide on-street parking. These streets will also typically feature transit stops near shops and bike lanes incorporated into the main travel lanes.<sup>1,3</sup> Larger roads, or feeder roads, tend to be located on the community's perimeters to keep vehicle traffic within neighborhoods minimal. This provides streets that are easier to cross at designated crossings, keeps many access points to parking outside of the primary pedestrian areas, and provides for a more environmentally friendly environment.

Narrower street designs also allow for incorporating curb extensions where the sidewalk extends out providing pedestrians a safe space to stand when crossing streets, or even congregate for social interactions in front of shops. The less land consumed for streets, the more land available for wider sidewalks, bike racks and storage, and opportunities for merchants to extend their marketplaces into the open. Active store fronts encourage more foot traffic into businesses whether it is from small café fronts or small market stalls.



Figure 11. Street-level amenities, such as outdoor dining, encourages walking.

Pedestrian friendly streetscaping will encourage drivers to park their cars and walk to stores, markets, and businesses. Streetscaping refers to the quality and effect of the street, as well as the ability for the street to be a place where people will gather and mingle, not just as a mechanism of getting from one place to another. Complete Neighborhoods and activity centers are destinations designed to provide an environment for interaction as part of living and working within the same area. The idea of streets being a safe place to walk, bicycle, drive, catch transit and even interact with others is a concept put forward in the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) guide "Urban Street Design Guide". When utilized effectively, there will be more pedestrian and bike activity, reducing carbon emissions and traffic noise in the surrounding area.<sup>3</sup>

Focusing solely on the makeup of the streets will not completely create a pedestrian-friendly environment that will draw people into the community. There also must be some emphasis on buildings and architecture. After all, businesses and activities are why people are there. Successful Complete Neighborhood projects have shown that active storefronts -- particularly at street level -- will attract more foot traffic for all the businesses. As previously noted, active storefronts can be achieved by creating outdoor dining opportunities such as cafes and market stalls or small parklets. Buildings should feature continuous facades, be well lit, and provide plenty of windows and easily accessible entry ways.<sup>2,3</sup> Avoid large blank exterior walls. In pedestrian scale design it has been noted that active walls tend to add to the feeling and perceptions of a safe street space. The overall safety feel can be established by outdoor dining surrounded by open, metal fencing. Parklets can provide outdoor seating with activity areas, as well as ample shade with trees strategically placed between the parklets and streets to provide pedestrian separation. Traditionally planners refer to this concept as creating outdoor rooms.<sup>2</sup>

Pedestrian-oriented streetscapes are another area that can be addressed by the form-based codes mentioned earlier in this guide. FBCs often include guidelines for architectural elements needed to better connect the street and adjacent buildings and to promote the development of spaces where walking is enjoyable.<sup>1</sup> Examples of these elements and benefits can be seen in figure 12.



Figure 12. The benefits of streetscaping for pedestrians and cyclists



Before

Figure 13. Rehoboth Avenue before streetscaping project



After

Figure 14. Rehoboth Avenue after streetscaping project

### Re-imagining Rehoboth Avenue: Rehoboth Beach, DE

Rehoboth Beach, Delaware is a popular destination in the summer for tourists who are seeking beach access along with other family activities. As a resort community, they tend to face the struggles of many resort communities, questioning “how to provide an environment where pedestrians and bicyclists are safe to move throughout, in an attractive business and entertainment district while reducing vehicle traffic and attracting more people into the community.” Often seen as a best practices project in streetscaping, the city worked with businesses, residents, and transportation to develop what became known as the “Rehoboth Avenue Streetscape Project.” This was a phased project to minimize the impact to residents, tourists, and businesses and to maintain activity levels and not deter anyone from coming in. To create an environment that was attractive to pedestrians, utilities were moved underground, sidewalks were widened to provide more space for interaction and movement, large parking lots were relocated to the outer edges of the districts with metered parking installed on the streets, and new lighting and landscaping were installed to increase safety.<sup>3</sup>

## **CHECKLIST:**

- Change sidewalk requirements to incorporate wider sidewalks with landscaping requirements for a buffer zone between streets and pedestrians
- Incorporate bike lanes into new roads for mixed use development
- Establish bike storage and parking requirements
- Incorporate parklets into all mixed-use developments or convert parking into parklets in property being redeveloped
- Incentivize or prioritize development of storefronts that can extend storefronts outside such as restaurants, and markets

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

Urban Street Design Guide: <https://nacto.org/publication/urban-street-design-guide/>

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# Neighborhood Vitality & Resiliency





# Neighborhood Vitality & Resiliency

No neighborhood is truly complete without a strong, vibrant community to enjoy all that it has to offer. Neighborhood vitality is a common measure of social health and is reflective of the availability of social capital in a community.<sup>14</sup> When social capital is abundant, a community feels livelier and more close-knit, and citizens feel as though they are a part of something larger than themselves.<sup>14</sup> High levels of neighborhood vitality encourage people to ride bikes to their community center, go shopping at boutiques, and meet friends for coffee or wine. A Complete Neighborhood should stimulate the growth of social capital by physically bringing neighbors together outside of their homes.

Researchers generally agree that vitality is strongly associated with walkability, and at times the

terms may be interchangeable with -- and the concepts indistinguishable from -- each other.<sup>4,7,9</sup> The issues surrounding neighborhood vitality are thus inherently pedestrian-scale. It is not possible to build the type of social connections necessary for a Complete Neighborhood from the inside of a car; strong neighborhood vitality requires face-to-face interaction, and by manipulating the built environment in terms of design, density, diversity, destination access, and distance to transit, cities can influence socialization and pedestrian activity among citizens.<sup>15</sup>

First and foremost, neighborhood vitality relies on the presence of diverse formal and informal social institutions.<sup>14</sup> These so-called “third places” are what drive community members to co-mingle outside of work and home on a regular basis.

## Case Study: Neighborhood Resilience Hubs in Ann Arbor, Michigan

Neighborhood resilience is a concept intrinsically linked to that of vitality.<sup>3,13</sup> It describes a community’s ability and preparedness to respond to environmental, economic, social, and institutional threats or disturbances.<sup>3,13</sup> A Complete Neighborhood uses its existing social capital to resist danger and to mitigate, adapt to, and recover from its consequences.

Building on existing community trust and vitality, Ann Arbor, Michigan (population: 124,000) opened its second resilience hub in June 2023.<sup>10</sup> These community centers provide various on-site services such as food distribution, youth education, bike repair, and stormwater management. The Bryant Community Center offers everyday after-school programs and weekly farmers’ markets, and at the Northside Park location, there are a variety of recreational amenities like soccer fields and basketball courts. As part of its carbon neutrality plan, the Northside Park resilience hub was awarded \$50,000 through the Solar Moonshot Program to install a 23-kilowatt solar power array.

Unfortunately, the official Ann Arbor website offers little information on how to get to and from the resilience hubs before, during, or after an emergency. Studies show similar resiliency plans in the US often lack the transportation resources and procedures necessary to fulfill evacuation efforts and distribute food or medical supplies.<sup>17</sup> Complete Neighborhoods should prepare to meet supply-chain and transportation needs and to consider the special challenges faced by vulnerable populations during an emergency.<sup>17</sup> A comprehensive guide for developing effective resilience hubs can be found in the Additional Resources section.

Mixed-use zoning policy provides opportunities for a variety of stores and restaurants to thrive within walking distance of customers.<sup>8-9,15</sup> Complete Neighborhoods can also boost vitality by funding community activity centers like libraries, parks, or natatoriums and by hosting regular social events like arts and music festivals or farmer's markets.<sup>14</sup> As an added benefit, studies show that the presence of local amenities within walking distance of transit and higher density CBDs positively impact social issues concerning community trust (such as per capita crime rates and residential stability.)<sup>8,14</sup>

Keeping in mind the importance of walkability, neighborhood vitality is heavily dependent on population levels and patterns of density.<sup>15-16,18</sup> The separation of residential and commercial areas makes it drastically more difficult for pedestrians to get from place to place. Mixed land use increases vitality by allowing for more compact development.<sup>15-16,18</sup> Research shows denser and/or more historical areas of a city have higher levels of vitality; this is likely due, in part, to the number and size of parcels in these areas.<sup>9,15,18</sup> Complete Neighborhoods can emulate downtown, urban centers through land readjustment initiatives that shorten blocks and define regularly shaped and sized parcels.<sup>4,6,9</sup> Whether or not land is vertically or horizontally dense also impacts neighborhood vitality: for example, researchers in Germany observed fewer opportunities for socialization among neighbors living in high-rise buildings.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, studies show that designing streets to include low-rise and continuous buildings (common with horizontal or street-level patterns of density) enhances vitality even in low- and medium-density areas.<sup>15-16</sup>

The aesthetic look and feel of a Complete Neighborhood should encourage walking and face-to-face interaction. Streets must seem as though they are a destination in and of themselves – not just empty space between buildings. Architectural design can provide a sense of enclosure that makes citizens feel safer



Figure 15. Face-to-face socialization is influenced by the look and feel of a community (Source: Nick Night on Unsplash)

and more comfortable while walking.<sup>4,6-7,12</sup> Studies find that buildings with small setbacks from the curb, numerous street-level windows and entrances, and continuous, undetached facades are beneficial to neighborhood vitality.<sup>4,6,12</sup> Tall trees and an abundance of greenery offer similar visual enclosure while barriers like on-street parking physically separate pedestrians from vehicles.<sup>4,6-7</sup> Parklets, pedestrian plazas, and outdoor dining areas serve as both aesthetically pleasing and functional enhancements that encourage the socialization necessary for a Complete Neighborhood.<sup>4,7,12</sup> More information on the importance of setting aside “small urban spaces” for socialization can be found in the Additional Resources section.

When studying neighborhood vitality researchers commonly use pedestrian counts or volume data to determine when and where citizens are walking around town.<sup>6,9</sup> This can be accomplished in several ways:

- Using automated pedestrian and bicycle counters to track and show use
- Conducting regular pedestrian traffic surveys in person.
- Collecting GPS data from mobile phones with the help of big data providers like StreetLight InSight

To determine the number of people lingering in an area, some GPS-based platforms provide data on stationary pedestrians.<sup>7</sup> This stationary data can also be extracted from geotagged social media posts: by examining the key words or hashtags, we begin to understand not only where people are spending time but also how they perceive their neighborhood.<sup>7</sup> In Milan, Italy, social media hashtags were collected before and after aesthetic improvements in parks and squares; negative sentiments concerning congestion and safety were overwhelmingly replaced with positive words like “beautiful” and “green.”<sup>7</sup> Additional datasets such as average vehicle speed, crime rates per capita, and historical crash data are important for establishing a record of pedestrian safety.<sup>4,8</sup> Sidewalks can be inventoried according to presence and quality to reveal gaps and damage that may dissuade walking.<sup>4</sup> Finally, spatial accessibility analyses report on the ability of pedestrians to travel to destinations of interest<sup>4</sup>: a detailed guide for planners can be found in the Additional Resources section.



Figure 16. A block party is a great way to encourage socialization and to foster community.  
(Source: Kenny Eliason on Unsplash)

## The Neighborhood Benchmarking Program: Garland, Texas

In 2002 the City of Garland, Texas (population: 246,000) began its Neighborhood Benchmarking Program (NBP), proactively approaching the issue of neighborhood vitality in this aging Dallas-Fort Worth suburb.<sup>2,5</sup> The NBP is a long-term planning tool that tracks performance and monitors change within the city's neighborhoods; it highlights at-risk and low-vitality neighborhoods by identifying certain patterns and warning signs over time. As part of the NBP, Garland city staff distribute annual neighborhood opinion surveys to gauge the concerns and priorities of its citizens. The city curates several geospatial datasets, such as crime statistics, housing code violations, pavement condition indexes, litter ratings, and demographics, on an annual basis as well. Frequent third-party appearance assessments are also conducted to determine curb appeal. These efforts allow the city to respond to the unique issues of each neighborhood individually, collaborate one-on-one with residents, and tailor existing and new programs to revitalize communities and encourage socialization. A 2016 interview with the Neighborhood Resources Administrator, Scott Bollinger, reveals Garland's biggest challenge has been determining how best to summarize and utilize survey results (for example, a neighborhood's perception of crime may not correspond with reality, making it difficult to respond in a practical way).

In addition to the Neighborhood Benchmarking Program, the city sponsors several other well-received vitality initiatives<sup>11</sup>:

- Neighborhood Vitality Matching Grant to fund beautification projects
- Home Improvement Incentive Rebate Program for the exterior remodeling of older houses
- Streamlined and easy application process for block party permits, including an annual \$500 grant per neighborhood
- Opportunities to reserve one or more Block Party Trailers, which supply foldable chairs/tables, canopies, water coolers, traffic cones, and outdoor games at no-cost

More information on tracking neighborhood vitality through benchmarking, community feedback, and other performance measures can be found in the Additional Resources section.

## **CHECKLIST:**

- Create third-places for socialization by implementing mixed-use zoning or by building community centers, parks, etc.
- Encourage face-to-face interaction on streets through horizontally dense architectural design
- Create a sense of enclosure with trees, on-street parking, and continuous/undetached building facades
- Determine pedestrian volume on streets using automated counters or GPS data
- Establish record of pedestrian safety on streets by looking at historical crash, speed, and traffic volume data
- Inventory sidewalks to identify gaps in accessibility to/from destinations

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

**Community Development Advocates of Detroit: Neighborhood Vitality Index:** <https://nvidetroit.org>

**National Association of City Transportation Officials: Performance Measures for Urban Vitality:** <https://nacto.org/publication/urban-street-stormwater-guide/partnerships-performance/performance-measures/performance-measures-urban-vitality>/<https://nacto.org/publication/urban-street-stormwater-guide/partnerships-performance/performance-measures/performance-measures-urban-vitality/>

**State Smart Transportation Initiative: Measuring Accessibility:** <https://iowa.sharepoint.com/:b:/s/CRCorridorMPO15-MinCity/K7rvD4BlhB8duVPm4uNnZwjfAsFLw?e=ZbCZjE>

**The Marginalian: The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces:** <https://www.themarginalian.org/2013/08/22/the-social-life-of-small-urban-spaces-whyte/>

**Urban Design Talks w/ Chris Bruntlett: The Dutch Blueprint for Urban Vitality:** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0-qXj\\_4ne-Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0-qXj_4ne-Y)

**Urban Sustainability Directors Network: Guide to Developing Resilience Hubs:** [https://resilience-hub.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/USDN\\_ResilienceHubsGuidance-1.pdf](https://resilience-hub.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/USDN_ResilienceHubsGuidance-1.pdf)

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# Equitable Design: Neighborhoods for All



# Equitable Design: Neighborhoods for All

Walkability -- the essence of a Complete Neighborhood -- doesn't mean the same thing to everybody. How far you can walk in 15 or 20 minutes is highly dependent upon factors both personal and environmental.<sup>2</sup> For instance, someone who is healthy and young may be able to walk nearly twice as fast and twice as long compared to someone who is older and/or disabled. And while some people can bound across a busy street or trudge through tall grass, parents with young children in strollers or people in wheelchairs require routes with well-maintained sidewalks and ADA compliant ramps. Furthermore, we know that the social costs of personal transportation are not shared equally. Matters of health, safety, and financial burden all impact a person's ability to walk in their neighborhood, and those in poverty or people in color often bear the brunt of this impact.<sup>6</sup> This next section discusses best practices for creating a Complete Neighborhood that addresses the inequities of age, race, socioeconomic status (SES), and ability on walkability.

## Age-Friendly Neighborhoods

A Complete Neighborhood should consider the impacts of age on walkability because a person's age can affect their ability to walk for long distances or over certain terrains.<sup>2,18</sup> For many older people, health problems, such as arthritis or visual deterioration, limit daily mobility; older bodies also tend to be frailer and more prone to injury.<sup>2,18</sup> For young children, lack of coordination or balance is similarly an issue, and their small size/stature can make it difficult to navigate public spaces built for adults.<sup>5,16</sup> Both groups are much more susceptible to injury in the event of a pedestrian-vehicle crash.<sup>16</sup> Young children account for more than 21 percent of all pedestrian-related deaths, and studies find that elderly pedestrians suffer significantly higher rates of serious injury

and trauma compared to other adult pedestrians.<sup>16</sup> Yet, despite the risks, walking is a source of independence for both the young and old.<sup>15-16</sup> Older adults who can no longer drive safely may depend on the ability to walk to doctor's appointments or to the grocery store, and young children often walk to class or ride bikes in the streets after school.

There are several ways to deliver the Complete Neighborhood experience for older residents. The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) recommends strategies for "aging in place" and stresses the need to provide affordable housing for elderly residents who may be on fixed, and limited, incomes. For instance, property tax credits (or homestead exemptions) and utility discounts for residents over the age of 62 allow people to stay in their homes as long as possible.<sup>2</sup> Inclusionary and mixed-use zoning policies allow for the development of a wide range of affordable housing types, including senior living facilities, closely interspersed with business.<sup>2,11</sup> Additionally, flexible zoning and housing codes can make it possible for older residents to convert single family homes into shared housing: unused garages and attics make great accessory apartments for caregivers and/or multi-generational families.<sup>2,11</sup>

Many communities specifically address mobility and transportation issues using this concept of "aging in place."<sup>2,4-5,18,20</sup> While typical plans for a Complete Neighborhood encourage 15- or 20-minute walksheds, the ARC recommends that services and resources be available within a 5-minute walk (or within 5-minute walk from public transit) for older populations. Even then, a 5-minute walk can be exhausting for some older people, and they may require frequent breaks. Benches and covered bus stops help take the strain off older residents as they are resting or waiting for their ride. At-grade vehicle boarding, increased contrast and font size on wayfinding



signs, and adequate street lighting can also make public transportation more age-friendly. Meanwhile, pedestrian safety measures such as Leading Pedestrian Intervals (LPIs) and flashing beacons at crosswalks are especially important for older people with diminished speeds and reaction times. And to help fill in the gaps between the pedestrian network and public transit system, Complete Neighborhoods can offer low-cost or free “guaranteed ride” services with Uber, Lyft, and other taxi companies.

### Case Study: From Around the World: Transportation Programs for Seniors

- In Boston, Massachusetts, the Rapid Senior Mentor Program buddies up inexperienced, elderly public transit riders with volunteers to make them feel safer and more comfortable when riding new routes.<sup>4</sup>
- In Columbus, Ohio, the Lyfting Villages pilot program provided over 600 Lyft rides in its first year – 46 percent of which were used for medical appointments. Ohio’s Columbus and Franklin Counties also offers a Neighbor Circulator Program, providing age-friendly, accessible, and low-cost transit with all stops specially selected by older residents themselves.<sup>4</sup>
- In Singapore, elderly residents can tap their “Green-Man+” card at crosswalks to gain up to 12 additional seconds of crossing time.<sup>18</sup>
- In Boise, Idaho, a door-to-door bus program for seniors guarantees rides for those further away from bus stops.<sup>1</sup>

Whereas initiatives for “aging in place” are intended for older populations, urban design and policy can also be leveraged to create safe, walkable, and complete communities for young children and their families.<sup>4,8</sup> Playful Learning Landscapes (PLLs) go beyond the typical park or playground by infusing play and child-

friendly games into ordinary urban amenities: this includes, for example, permanent hopscotch markings on sidewalks and interactive puzzles built into benches and bus stops. Multifunctional greenspace such as stormwater parks combines utility with play in wet and dry conditions, and intergenerational spaces like community centers foster a sense of community between younger and older residents who may have few opportunities to interact otherwise. Complete Neighborhoods built for children should also provide adequate pedestrian and bike infrastructure around schools. Wide sidewalks, on-street parking, and off-street trails minimize children’s exposure to cars while traffic calming measures such as speed humps, narrowed lanes, and painted crosswalks slow speeds in school zones. Walking school buses and bike trains are also fun and safe methods of transportation to and from school.



Figure 17. Multigenerational playground equipment. (Source: Outdoor Design Source)

### Racially and Economically Diverse Neighborhoods

The socioeconomic status (SES) and racial/ethnic makeup of a neighborhood can have profound influence on its urban design and transportation needs. Minority communities have been historically disadvantaged through discriminatory housing practices and segregation.<sup>7</sup> Black neighborhoods tend to have higher rates of poverty, unemployment, and crime, and they

also disproportionately rely heavily on walking, biking, and transit services to get around.<sup>7,15</sup> Many minorities subsequently suffer from “consequences of place,” or the negative impacts of an environment on factors such as health, SES, and education.<sup>15</sup> For example, studies have repeatedly shown the benefit of greenspace and clean air on heart and lung health, and yet, historically redlined communities often lack parks, trees, and non-impervious spaces.<sup>6,12</sup> Low SES groups of all races and ethnicities struggle with neighborhood-level inequities in terms of available infrastructure and amenities.<sup>6,10</sup> Pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, in particular, is inequitably distributed across many cities in the US; this increases injury and death risk for these groups and isolates disadvantaged communities from the rest of the city.<sup>6,15-16</sup> Additionally, the act of gentrification not only physically displaces the poor but also displaces them economically, culturally, and politically.<sup>9</sup> As an example, gentrification has led to this misconception in planning that cycle tracks and walk lanes are

meant for the young professional commuting to work.<sup>9</sup> Studies find that many people of lower socioeconomic status would feel unwelcome using newly constructed facilities, and in fact, they may be priced out from an area before ever getting the chance to partake.<sup>9</sup>

To address inequities born from race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, a Complete Neighborhood should leverage community-led and transit-oriented design<sup>17,19</sup>, including:

- Tailoring amenities to a neighborhood’s cultural needs
- Approving infill development for smaller and more affordable housing types near transit
- Using vacant lots to create transition areas or pocket parks between neighborhoods
- Using repeated symbols and landmarks to encourage a shared neighborhood identity
- Showcasing minority artwork in parks and along streets
- Ensuring clear sightlines from houses to streets

### Case Study: Communities of Concern in Atlanta, Georgia

As part of their Vision Zero initiative to end all traffic fatalities, the Atlanta Department of Transportation (ATLDOT) curates a GIS dataset identifying neighborhoods of transportation vulnerability. ATLDOT scores each Neighborhood Statistical Area (NSA) in the city according to an equity framework which highlights outliers by standard deviation in the following 9 areas (as provided by the American Community Survey):

- Population of individuals under the age of 18
- Population of individuals over the age of 65
- Population of individuals identifying as non-Hispanic Black
- Population of individuals with a disability
- Population of individuals under poverty line
- Population of individuals lacking health insurance
- Households lacking access to personal vehicles
- Households relying on public transit to commute to/from work
- Households headed by single parents

This dataset is used to prioritize planning projects in the most disadvantaged neighborhoods in Atlanta and to evaluate the geographical impacts of transportation needs year-to-year. Neighborhood-wide walk scores, bicycle level-of-stress models, and pavement/sidewalk networks can similarly be used to determine inequality in the built infrastructure of an area.<sup>10</sup>

ATLDOT (personal communication, July 2023)

- Avoiding fences, gates, and private streets that unnecessarily restrict access and segregate communities



Figure 18. Mural celebrating diversity along MLK Boulevard in Chattanooga, TN. (Source: Billy Weeks/ Reuters)

### Accessible Neighborhoods

Many of the same design issues listed above affect people with physical, mental, or intellectual disabilities.<sup>3,10,13-14,21</sup> It's important to remember that people move at different speeds and with varying levels of ease: indeed, it can be tempting to overlook disabled bodies by focusing too heavily on specific time windows and thus, valuing speed over accessibility. Research in this area suggests that Complete Neighborhood fundamentals like mixed and high-density land use and adequate greenspace access are essential for promoting social interaction and physical activity among people with disabilities. The following points are examples of inclusive design and services to be considered:

- Wide sidewalks and ADA accessible curb cutouts or ramps for people in wheelchairs
- Tactile strips, color-contrasted bollards and curbs, and Accessible Pedestrian Signals for people with auditory or visual disabilities
- Wheelchair accessible swings and picnic tables at parks
- Sensory-friendly playrooms at recreation centers, sports stadiums, and airports
- Paratransit services



Figure 19. Tactile cues along a street for blind pedestrians. (Source: Unsplash)

## **CHECKLIST:**

- Avoid arbitrary, one-size-fits-all goals measured in time or distance and consider the unique needs of community members
- Develop an “Aging in Place” plan to help older residents live independently in their own homes
- Offer low-cost and accessible transportation options including rideshare and paratransit services
- Incorporate accessible, sensory-friendly play in everyday landscapes like parks or bus stops
- Make crosswalks safer and more accessible by adding LPs and Accessible Pedestrian Signals with auditory, visual, and tactile cues
- Encourage community-led design and tailor amenities to the community’s cultural needs
- Create a sense of community with shared symbols, landmarks, and memorials that tell a story of unification
- Develop a plan to tackle the issues of gentrification and leverage transit-oriented development to benefit at-risk, lower-income, and/or minority families
- Identify disadvantaged communities by analyzing historical and current transportation vulnerabilities

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

**Atlanta Regional Commission - Aging in Place: A Toolkit for Local Governments:** [https://www.ca-ilg.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/resources\\_aginginplace.pdf](https://www.ca-ilg.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/resources_aginginplace.pdf)

**Center for Transit-Oriented Development: Performance-Based Transit-Oriented Development Typology Guidebook:** <https://todresources.org/resources/performance-based-transit-oriented-development-typology-guidebook/>

**State of New Jersey Department of Transportation: Manual of Best Practices for**

**Transit-Oriented Development:** <https://www.nj.gov/transportation/community/village/pdf/todbestpracticesmanual2013.pdf>

**Texas A&M Transportation Institute: Understanding the Role of Equity in Active Transportation Planning in the United States:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/01441647.2016.1239660>

**United States Census Bureau: American Community Survey Data:** <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/data.html>

**Walk Score Professional:** <https://www.walkscore.com/professional/>

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# Effective Public Engagement



# Effective Public Engagement

As with any initiative that seeks to shift norms, Complete Neighborhoods have received their share of backlash and controversy. The idea of restructuring a community – even if done with the best of intentions – can make some people apprehensive about the future and leave them wondering how their lives will be impacted. Whether the controversy concerns money or equality, traffic congestion or safety, facts or unfounded fears, makes no difference; many people simply yearn to be involved in the day-to-day functions of their community. It's important that both individuals and groups (including businesses and corporations) have meaningful opportunities to participate in the process and find the best way forward based on a cooperative vision. A Complete Neighborhood must rely on the public to find its way, because there is something truly special about socializing and working together at the neighborhood-level.

While public engagement comes with its own challenges, a community is -- more often than not -- better off for having developed the skills and procedures necessary to communicate and collaborate effectively. Public engagement is a long-term commitment encompassing three key areas: outreach, consultation, and involvement. The following sections summarize each area and give examples of how a city can foster interaction with its citizens to build a Complete Neighborhood.<sup>2</sup>

## Public Outreach

Public engagement begins with outreach<sup>1-3</sup>; a city is responsible for keeping its citizens informed about upcoming plans and projects. Public outreach involves sharing information openly and ethically as well as setting the record straight when rumors and misinformation spread among those who are skeptical. Methods of disseminating

information about Complete Neighborhoods can be tailored to specific communities or groups of people.

Meanwhile, data should be easily accessible by the public: this is a great opportunity to utilize pre-built data hubs (like the ones available on resources such as ArcGIS Online), to embed webmaps and graphs to city websites, and to post timely updates on social media. Transparent policies on data collection and its use build community trust while inviting people to fill in the gaps where possible. For instance, a crowdsourcing campaign for bike racks is a two-fold outreach method that not only informs the public where bike racks exist but also collects rack locations that may be missing in a city's database.

DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Provide timely information</li><li>✓ Have authoritative data easily accessible online</li><li>✓ Engage different groups of people in a variety of ways</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✗ Be afraid to admit when something goes wrong</li><li>✗ Forget about marginalized groups and neighborhoods with different cultural and/or literacy needs</li></ul>

Figure 20. The "Do's and Don'ts" of public outreach. (Source: Original)

## Public Consultation

Public consultation requires the ongoing and prolonged discussion of a community's concerns and priorities<sup>1-3</sup>. This is a city's chance to ask for input on its Complete Neighborhood goals and to find shared purpose and meaning for moving forward with its plans. Consultation should be a back-and-forth process of listening and responding to the community's opinions -- even if they're intensely unpopular or divided.

Diversity and inclusion need to be a top priority for a Complete Neighborhood, especially at this stage of engagement! It's important to incorporate minority voices and avoid biased perspectives by consulting one-on-one with various neighborhood advocates and by using anonymity in surveys selectively.

It's also important to avoid having predetermined plans and actions; a city's willingness to change plans and to follow-up on hot issues often stands as proof of meaningful public consultation. A board of supervisors, along with knowledgeable and experienced planning professionals, can help facilitate such conversation with the community and its stakeholders. Many Complete Neighborhoods host and record the outcomes of regular public meetings in-person and online; however, the following are alternative methods of consultation that may be more productive and/or accessible to people unable to attend due to work or transportation needs<sup>5</sup>:

- Design workshops and charettes
- Walking tours and curb audits
- Open hours and meet-and-greets
- Online surveys
- Community input maps

## Public Involvement

At this stage of engagement, it's time to start making decisions and carrying out the long list projects that make neighborhoods more complete. Public involvement is a participatory and democratic approach to achieving community goals<sup>1-3</sup>. Complete Neighborhood members and stakeholders should be involved directly in the life of a project. Including everything from fundraising to propagating additional outreach materials, volunteer work should be hands-on and open-to-all. Active volunteering creates a sense of ownership for community members; for example, citizens can help place barriers and paint artwork

on tactile walk/bike lanes. Furthermore, public involvement should include efforts to share in the responsibilities of leadership and to monitor/evaluate progress towards a community's goals: be willing to work closely with and delegate tasks to community leaders! Pilot and pop-up projects are great for getting community members involved in planning experiments, allowing them to see for themselves the outcomes of their hard work: a guidebook on tactical urbanism can be found in the Additional Resources section.





Figure 21. Yard signage in Minneapolis, coordinated by Neighbors for More Neighbors as part of the 2040 Civic Engagement Plan. (Source: @GRIDSVancouver on Twitter)

## Case Study: Grassroots Engagement for a Complete Neighborhood in Minneapolis, Minnesota

Facing an uphill battle to change residential land use policy as they knew it, Minneapolis, Minnesota (population: 2,990,000) developed a strategic plan that would forever change the way cities engage and interact with the public.<sup>4-5</sup> Minneapolis city officials and staff knew the pitfalls of the traditional public meeting: what was once a time-honored institution of US democracy had become an unproductive, intimidating workspace -- often overrun by white males. The 2040 Civic Engagement Plan sought to manufacture a grassroots-like movement and engage citizens organically; at its core, the plan targeted underrepresented communities (like immigrants, people of color, and single parents) and met people where they were, bringing interactive and family-friendly activities such as these to their doorstep:

- Street festivals and pop-up activities like trivia contests, improv shows, and poetry readings
- “Meeting-in-a-box” kits that resembled book clubs and contained all the materials necessary to host meetings and debates among neighbors and friends
- Walk-and-talk tours arranged by advocacy groups such as Neighbors for More Neighbors
- Online ‘Tweet with a Planner’ Q&A sessions
- Surveys and interactive maps translated for those with limited-English skills
- An augmented reality app that allows users to dream up new street designs

At the end of 2018, Minneapolis passed radical new legislation through the city council to upzone areas of single-family housing, encouraging vertically dense and mixed-use development. Heather Worthington, Director of Long-Range Planning, attributes the successful 12-1 vote to their civic engagement plan that ignited passions and built trust within the community. A copy of Minneapolis’s 2040 Civic Engagement Plan can be found in the Additional Resources section.

## **CHECKLIST:**

- Keep citizens informed of upcoming plans and projects by creating a public outreach program that is authoritative, timely, and transparent
- Go beyond the traditional public meeting and utilize different methods of outreach and consultation for different communities, including social media posts, mailers, festivals, walking tours, Q&A sessions, etc.
- Incorporate minority voices and avoid biased perspectives by consulting one-on-one with various neighborhood advocates
- Get the community directly involved in leadership and volunteer roles
- Collect opinions and crowdsource data through online surveys and webmaps

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

**City of Minneapolis: 2040 Civic Engagement Plan:** <https://minneapolis2040.com/media/1216/minneapolis-2040-civic-engagement-plan.pdf>

**Neighborland: Public Engagement Software:** <https://neighborland.com>

**Strong Towns: The Ultimate Guide to Better Public Engagement:** <https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2018/5/30/the-ultimate-guide-to-better-public-engagement>

**Tactical Urbanist's Guide to Materials & Design:** [https://issuu.com/streetplanscollaborative/docs/tu-guide\\_to\\_materials\\_and\\_design\\_v1](https://issuu.com/streetplanscollaborative/docs/tu-guide_to_materials_and_design_v1)

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# Incentivization

# Incentivization

Enticing development within a community can, at times, be difficult, particularly if development requires demolition or renewal or developers are confined to adaptive reuse of existing buildings. Development is frequently based on concepts conceived by developers or plans found within a comprehensive plan for the community. Often, it is easier to develop open areas that require merely adding infrastructure instead of re-working entire buildings to fit new concepts.

Additionally, developers may not have a desire to develop the same areas as the local government or venture into new concepts in the hopes that businesses will move in, or residents will purchase housing within the developments. Therefore, it can be to both the community's and developer's benefit if incentives are offered for rapid development -- applying new concepts to development or developing in areas that may be less than prime in the eyes of the developers.

## Non-Financial Incentives

Incentives can take many forms and are not necessarily always financial in nature. Localities can offer expedited zoning, development approval, or permitting processes. The locality can identify the building types desired within certain

developments and create an expedited approval process for developments fitting those types. If localities are seeking to improve communities or re-develop certain areas and spaces, a process can be created where these developments are moved ahead of other priorities to reduce planning times and expedite construction.<sup>1</sup> This can be done for zoning processes or overall development approval processes, particularly if the developer has created developments fitting the desired concepts previously. The locality can consider giving preference to projects that will redevelop blighted or previously undesirable areas.

Localities can encourage adaptive reuse of vacant buildings or existing buildings that may be underutilized. This process can be incentivized by expedited permitting processes, relaxing restrictions for reuse of buildings or even a reduction in permitting fees.<sup>1</sup> Since the pandemic, many communities are left with underutilized office buildings with businesses maintaining large remote work forces. This provides an opportunity to analyze how these buildings can be repurposed to meet housing demands and reduce shortages or provide long term housing for the unsheltered. Converting underutilized or vacant offices is a significant task which would drive away some developers; therefore, relaxing some re-use

## Case Study: Adaptive Reuse Ordinance in Los Angeles, CA

Expedited review processes and relaxed requirements have been in place in Los Angeles since 1999. Facing a glut of vacant offices, factories, and historical buildings with a significant lack housing, Los Angeles developed an Adaptive Reuse Ordinance to incentivize the conversion of commercial structures for residential use. This has led to the creation of over 12,000 new housing units since its inception. This ordinance has recently been expanded since the pandemic to further convert underutilized commercial space into housing. The intent is to further incentivize in fill and mixed-use development, while repurposing structures for new housing. Additional benefits from the ordinance are preservation of historical structures, reducing carbon emissions as fewer residents need to commute, and reducing construction costs.

requirements or an expedited permitting process will move these projects along. These incentives would also encourage the re-use of historical buildings which would keep the characteristics of the community while changing how the community is configured.

Like the Adaptive Reuse Ordinance, localities can adopt flexible use codes. Many commercial buildings are built with one use in mind based on the local code. This creates buildings that have one time during the day when they are being utilized. Localities may consider adopting flexible use ordinances or codes where the facility can be utilized in multiple ways depending on the time of day.<sup>1</sup> A restaurant that operates only during certain hours can be opened for meeting spaces in the off hours, or a bookstore/ library may operate as classroom facilities in the off hours. This provides business owners with the opportunity to capture additional revenue while allowing for other spaces to operate in existing buildings, eliminating the need for large developments and parking lots.

A mixture of monetary incentives has been utilized by localities to encourage development. These incentives range from grants provided by government entities to tax abatement plans and tax increment financing districts. Additional opportunities for funding redevelopment have also been found with foundations and nonprofits like the Knight Foundation or Bloomberg

Philanthropies.<sup>6</sup> The type of incentive applied will depend on the type of project and who the applicant would be. It is more common for the locality to obtain grants, whether it would be through a governmental entity or foundation, and more common for the developer to be the recipient of the tax incentive, as the government is administrator over tax programs.

### Financial Incentives

Tax abatement is the reduction or elimination of property taxes over a period in exchange for capital investment, usually buildings. This incentive is often offered to developers or companies who make improvements to blighted or vacant properties. In many instances there are conditions placed on the incentive: adds affordable housing stock, community benefit like job training or grocery store in a food desert or brings in services to an area that lacks specific services.<sup>7</sup> This type of incentive can encourage infill development and community improvements in economically distressed areas. The drawback is that the locality must be able to absorb the lost tax revenue for the abatement.

Another incentive available to localities is tax increment financing, commonly called TIF. TIF is a concept where special tax districts are created primarily around redevelopment of distressed communities. It is a process where the future taxes, primarily property taxes, for the district

### Case Study: Tax Abatement Incentives in Spokane, WA

Spokane, Washington has utilized the tax abatement approach to address an affordable housing shortage. There are two programs in Spokane that encourage the development of housing through tax abatement: Multifamily tax exemption and parking 2 people. The first program provides tax abatement over various time periods for the development of multifamily housing developments, whether they are condominiums, apartments, or student housing. The second program provides abatements to developers who convert surface parking lots in the city to affordable housing complexes. While both programs provide for additional housing, program number two eliminates surface parking, reducing carbon emissions, increasing the ability of residents to work and live in the city and connects more areas of the city.

are utilized to pay for future development or infrastructure construction within the TIF district. Generally, the tax rates are frozen at the rate when the development was established, the rate for the TIF agreement's duration. While the funds are typically available to cover additional development or infrastructure, they have been used to pay debt service on the bonds acquired to cover the initial development.<sup>5</sup> The crucial factor here is that the funds are not available for any other program or project within the locality. However, if the TIF is isolated to just property tax, the locality can recover other taxes like sales tax from within the TIF for use locality wide. This type of financing has been widely used across the United States, often to spur redevelopment of blighted areas within a city. TIFs are only available when the state government provides for such through legislation. Currently TIFs are used in all states and the District of Columbia except for Arizona. While this is an effective mechanism to incentive developers, the locality must weigh the cost of isolating revenues for one purpose versus collecting revenue that can be used community wide. It is important to note that all taxing bodies within a locality are impacted by TIF. For example, a TIF in a low-income area could result in a decrease in available tax revenue for the school district, which would negatively impact the ability for the school district to provide in that area.

Finally, there are usually grants available from state and federal agencies or national foundations. These are typically available for specific projects or activities rather than the development of an entire area. Over the last couple of years, several infrastructure and jobs bills have been created at the federal level with the goal of providing funds to localities to make improvements geared towards safety, infrastructure, and job creation. While these grants do not provide for the redevelopment of an entire area, they can be utilized to make various improvements that would provide redevelopment in phases. For example, the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) administers a grant program called

Safe Streets and Roads for All. This program allocates \$5 billion for communities to make street improvements to improve safety. This would be an ideal way for a community to rebalance streets or modify streets that would make them pedestrian friendly by providing traffic calming, bump outs for crossings or recovering street space for bicycle and pedestrian use. 2

One federal program that does provide for the planning for the redevelopment of a neighborhood wide area is the Choice Neighborhood Initiative (CNI) available through the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). While these grant funds can be used for neighborhood redevelopment, they are reserved for revitalizing HUD neighborhoods and the areas within the immediate proximity. However, if a locality has decided that Complete Neighborhoods are good for the community, then the process should be applied equitably to all neighborhoods. Therefore, CNI grants would be an opportunity to capitalize on funds otherwise not available for redevelopment.<sup>4</sup>

While grants provide an opportunity to redevelop neighborhoods, they do pose some challenges. Grants are not typically available to developers, but only to the local government entity who would have to manage the grant as well provide any matching services in kind or funds. These do provide an opportunity for the locality to cover costs for community planning or infrastructure improvements needed to prime the property for development. This would lower the burden for developers coming in to construct housing or commercial structures.

## CHECKLIST

- Create non-financial incentives such as expedited permitting and review processes for developers seeking to engage in mixed use or activity center developments
- Develop re-use ordinances to encourage redevelopment of vacant properties into new housing or uses, as well as constructing new developments over existing parking lot properties
- Engage with community foundations that have access to non-traditional funding mechanisms.
- Identify traditional state and federal grant opportunities for neighborhood redevelopment and revitalization

## Additional Resources:

**Place Based Tax Incentives for Community Development:** <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/periodicals/em/SpringSummer19/highlight1.html>

**Planning Department unveils citywide adaptive reuse ordinance:** <https://la.urbanize.city/post/planning-department-unveils-draft-citywide-adaptive-reuse-ordinance>

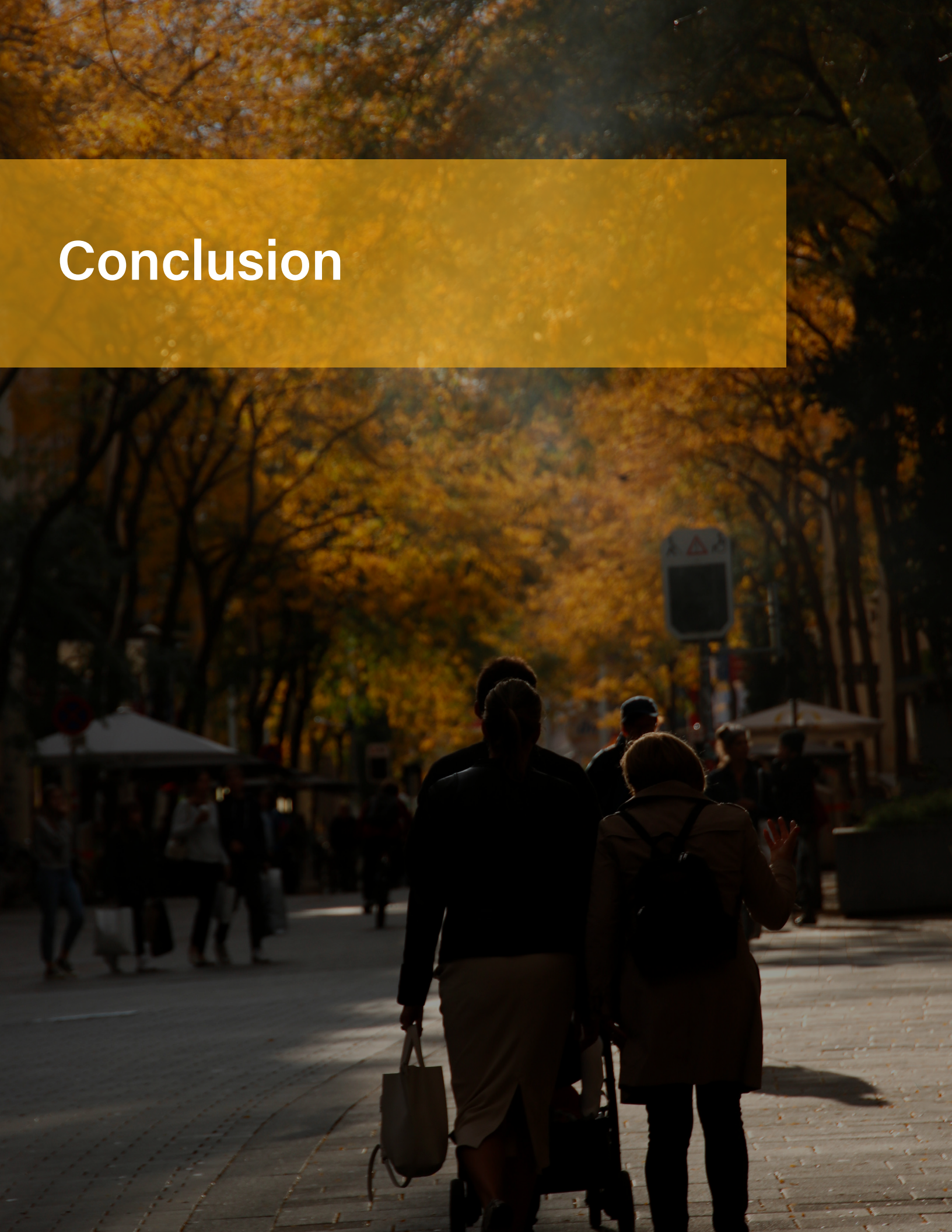
**How Adaptive Reuse Can Solve the Housing Crisis:** <https://www.planning.org/planning/2021/spring/how-adaptive-reuse-can-help-solve-the-housing-crisis/>

**Creative Revitalization:** <https://www.ccim.com/cire-magazine/articles/2022/summer/creative-revitalization/>

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# Conclusion





# Conclusion

After breaking down what the Complete Neighborhood is, it becomes clear that the concepts within this guidebook do not seem so out of reach and very achievable. Concepts such as better access to local services, reclaiming space for pedestrians, and utilizing infill development build upon the current community and allow it to thrive and be resilient. The concept of building streets for people and providing accessible active transportation creates connectivity within the neighborhood as well as across the city by implementing safe pedestrian-focused infrastructure. All of these concepts are crucial to the successful implementation of a Complete Neighborhood. These concepts will not be successful though unless broad public engagement occurs to gather the community's support for the project as well as their input for how the community would like their neighborhood to evolve around them. Additionally, the entire process of developing and implementing a complete neighborhood will need to be done through an equity-lense. Only then will the neighborhood be built for all to enjoy, collaborate, and thrive.

# Complete Neighborhoods: A Guidebook Checklist

## Overview

### What is a Complete Neighborhood

The Complete Neighborhood concept is not really all that revolutionary – it is a return to the fundamentals of community planning. A Complete Neighborhood offers personalized and human-centered mobility solutions, avoiding “one-size-fits-all” perspectives when determining levels of walkability and accessibility.

Designing neighborhoods almost exclusively to meet the needs of drivers has exacerbated what we call “urban sprawl.” By allowing development to spread out far beyond the natural boundaries of a city, we have become dependent on the car to get around in our daily lives. But where does that leave people unable to afford the costs of owning and maintaining a vehicle of their own? Or people who are too young or old to drive? A Complete Neighborhood makes sure amenities like grocery stores, hospitals and doctor’s offices, restaurants, parks and recreation centers, churches, and schools are accessible by everyone. Plus, walking, biking, and other forms of active transportation are cheaper, safer, healthier, and more environmentally conscious than cars!

To learn more about Complete Neighborhoods, check out the Complete Neighborhoods: A Guidebook.

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# Complete Neighborhoods: A Guidebook Checklist

## Supportive Development Regulations

### Content

1. Define Complete Neighborhood boundaries
2. Assess current conditions within defined boundaries
3. Conduct community outreach programming to define the community's vision for the neighborhood
4. Create form-based code based on defined area and community feedback

### Additional Comments:

### Data Needs & Sources

- Land parcel GIS data
- GIS data on local businesses and property uses
- Utilize the "Effective Public Engagement" section for community visioning
- Utilize the Form-Based Code Institutes resources for developing and implementing form-based code.

# Complete Neighborhoods: A Guidebook Checklist

## Better Local Access to Things People Need

### Content

1. Incorporate more mixed-use zoning and development into comprehensive planning
2. Develop parking requirements supportive of mixed-use zoning and compact development
3. Review current transportation and street plans to identify opportunities to incorporate pedestrian and bike friendly components to align with mixed-use communities
4. Develop activity and community space requirements for new developments to support community activity programs and outdoor markets
5. Develop re-use ordinances to encourage redevelopment of vacant properties into new housing or uses, as well as constructing new developments over existing parking lot properties

### Additional Comments:

### Data Needs & Sources

- Mixed-use zoning code
- Parking requirements for mixed-use development
- Zoning code that allows new developments to allow community activity programs
- Re-use ordinances
- National Association of City Transportation Officials Urban Street Design Guide
- Federal Highway Administration's Highway Design Standards

# Complete Neighborhoods: A Guidebook Checklist

## Filling in the Gaps

### Content

1. Inventory all lots that are currently not being utilized within the Complete Neighborhood area
2. Analyze what services are currently within the Complete Neighborhood boundaries
3. After analysis, engage with the community to see what infill locations would best suit the community based on services that are needed
4. Begin creating form-based zoning for this area to match community input and the Complete Neighborhood vision

### Additional Comments:

### Data Needs & Sources

- Land parcel GIS data
- GIS data on local businesses and property uses
- Utilize the “Effective Public Engagement” section for community visioning
- Utilize the Form-Based Code Institutes resources for developing and implementing form-based code.

# Complete Neighborhoods: A Guidebook Checklist

## Reclaiming Parking Spaces

### Content

1. Incorporate bike storage and parking into development plans
2. Develop new parking requirements based on maximums, shared use or minimums with a percentage of space added based on use
3. Provide incentives to develop underutilized parking lots into new mixed-use developments
4. Convert on-street parking to pay for parking and re-invest the revenue into maintenance of the district
5. Convert on-street parking into public use areas as an extension of storefronts

### Additional Comments:

### Data Needs & Sources

- Current bike storage and parking capacity
- Zoning code for bike storage and parking requirements
- New reduced parking requirements
- Parking lot GIS data

# Complete Neighborhoods: A Guidebook Checklist

## Biking and Walking as Real Transportation Options

### Content

1. Conduct an active transportation audit to understand the existing conditions of this infrastructure inside the neighborhood
2. Create projects to address issues that were identified within the active transportation audit
3. Prioritize projects based on impact on safety, equity, and connectivity
4. Incorporate projects into the community's capital improvement program

### Additional Comments:

### Data Needs & Sources

- Active transportation audit
- Social vulnerability index data from the Center for Disease Control

# Complete Neighborhoods: A Guidebook Checklist

## Streets for People

### Content

1. Review current design guidelines being utilized for building roadways within the community
2. Identify what current design guidelines do not contain pedestrian safety and multimodal focus
3. Update street design guidelines to contain pedestrian safety and multimodal aspects

### Additional Comments:

### Data Needs & Sources

- Current design guidelines
- Complete street policy
- National Association of City Transportation Officials Urban Street Design Guide
- Federal Highway Administration's Highway Design Standards



# Complete Neighborhoods: A Guidebook Checklist

## Streets and Spaces that Encourage Walking

### Content

1. Change sidewalk requirements to incorporate wider sidewalks with landscaping requirements for a buffer zone between streets and pedestrians
2. Incorporate bike lanes into new roads for mixed use development
3. Establish bike storage and parking requirements
4. Incorporate parklets into all mixed-use developments or convert parking into parklets in property being redeveloped
5. Incentivize or prioritize development of storefronts that can extend storefronts outside such as restaurants, and markets

### Additional Comments:

### Data Needs & Sources

- Sidewalk design guidelines with larger frontage between roadway and sidewalk
- Zoning code that requires bike storage and parking requirements
- Zoning code that requires parklets in newly developed and redeveloped areas
- Zoning code that allows for storefronts to extend onto sidewalk

# Complete Neighborhoods: A Guidebook Checklist

## Neighborhood Vitality & Resiliency

### Content

1. Create third-places for socialization by implementing mixed-use zoning or by building community centers, parks, etc.
2. Encourage face-to-face interaction on streets through horizontally dense architectural design
3. Create a sense of enclosure with trees, on-street parking, and continuous/undetached building facades
4. Determine pedestrian volume on streets using automated counters or GPS data
5. Establish record of pedestrian safety on streets by looking at historical crash, speed, and traffic volume data
6. Inventory sidewalks to identify gaps in accessibility to/from destinations

### Additional Comments:

### Data Needs & Sources

- Community data based on desired third-places
- Street tree analysis
- Pedestrian volumes
- Pedestrian safety data
- Sidewalk gap analysis
- Accessibility audit

# Complete Neighborhoods: A Guidebook Checklist

## Equitable Design: Neighborhoods for All

### Content

1. Avoid arbitrary, one-size-fits-all goals measured in time or distance and consider the unique needs of community members
2. Develop an “Aging in Place” plan to help older residents live independently in their own homes
3. Offer low-cost and accessible transportation options including rideshare and paratransit services
4. Incorporate accessible, sensory-friendly play in everyday landscapes like parks or bus stops
5. Make crosswalks safer and more accessible by adding LPIs and Accessible Pedestrian Signals with auditory, visual, and tactile cues
6. Encourage community-led design and tailor amenities to the community’s cultural needs
7. Create a sense of community with shared symbols, landmarks, and memorials that tell a story of unification
8. Develop a plan to tackle the issues of gentrification and leverage transit-oriented development to benefit at-risk, lower-income, and/or minority families

### Additional Comments:

### Data Needs & Sources

- Performance measures that include more than time or distance
- Community input on rideshare and paratransit services
- Analysis of sensory-play area gaps
- Analysis of current crosswalk devices
- 2020 Census data for income, demographics, and commute method
- Map of current transit services

# Complete Neighborhoods: A Guidebook Checklist

## Effective Public Engagement

### Content

1. Keep citizens informed of upcoming plans and projects by creating a public outreach program that is authoritative, timely, and transparent
2. Go beyond the traditional public meeting and utilize different methods of outreach and consultation for different communities, including social media posts, mailers, festivals, walking tours, Q&A sessions, etc.
3. Incorporate minority voices and avoid biased perspectives by consulting one-on-one with various neighborhood advocates
4. Get the community directly involved in leadership and volunteer roles
5. Collect opinions and crowdsource data through online surveys and webmaps

### Additional Comments:

### Data Needs & Sources

- Public outreach strategy
- Social vulnerability index data from the Center for Disease Control
- Ways to contact community organizations
- Community data like addresses

# Complete Neighborhoods: A Guidebook Checklist

## Incentivization

### Content

1. Create non-financial incentives such as expedited permitting and review processes for developers seeking to engage in mixed use or activity center developments
2. Develop re-use ordinances to encourage redevelopment of vacant properties into new housing or uses, as well as constructing new developments over existing parking lot properties
3. Engage with community foundations that have access to non-traditional funding mechanisms.
4. Identify traditional state and federal grant opportunities for neighborhood redevelopment and revitalization

### Additional Comments:

### Data Needs & Sources

- Successful re-use ordinances
- Information for what community foundations utilize non-traditional funding mechanisms
- State and federal grant opportunities for neighborhood redevelopment and revitalization