TOWN MAKER’S GUIDE: Healthy Building Placement

Walkable and Livable Communities Institute

Automobile-Focused

- Over-head electrical poles add to visual clutter
- Strip center retail
- Billboard signage scaled for passing automobiles
- Shoebox lighting too tall for human scale

People-Focused

- Retail corner entrance with residential above
- Multi-family units on secondary street
- Surface parking interior to development
- Attractive buildings front the main street adding to the living experience
- Trees line streets to create a sense of enclosure

Edges

- Edges are essential for a comfortable walk. Edges define spaces and provide visual cues to guide appropriate behaviors. Open spaces such as this can create high levels of discomfort for both walkers and drivers. Without an edge, walkers feel they have entered the motorist's realm and may feel uncomfortable. Pedestrians do not belong, so they do not expect them. Edgesless streets look sick and make people feel ill.

Sidewalks

- Sidewalks must be a comfortable width (typically 6-8 feet for suburban commercial areas). Be separated from the curb with a planter strip of 4-10 feet. Be continuous and not open to numerous driveways. In general, the higher the roadway spaced, the wider the planter strip. This space lacks a sidewalk completely, but even the portion with a walk does not invite walking.

Buildings

- Buildings are built on building-to-building widths of asphalt as wide as 400 feet. Such inhospitable environments (too hot in the summer, too cold in the winter and lonely all the time) do not harbor walking, bicycling, transit, or even auto controls. Off-street parking takes three times as much land as on-street parking.

Character

- Quality edges provide a protective enclosure and satisfying the human eye, heart and soul. Edges address our need for comfort, safety and security. Creating a sense of enclosure usually requires buildings to the interior edge of walkways, planting ground cover and trees, and including an on-street parking buffer to the pedestrian from moving traffic. Edges are essential to an enjoyable walking experience.

Sidewalks

- Sidewalks of sufficient width allow walking to be the most natural, fun, rewarding and healthy way to travel. They allow people to enjoy walking, to relax, to converse with another, to linger or sit outdoors at a cafe, and they encourage people to stay and socialize. Although sidewalks can be made of a mixture of materials from concrete to pavers, the most pleasant walkways have a simple tarmac—trees and well constructed and maintained.

Buildings

- Quality buildings not only create an address, they address the street. Well designed urban buildings have 70-90% glass or grade, giving natural surveillance to the street. A palette of colors, shapes, sizes, textures, window styles add profitability, authority, and dignity to a street. In order to improve fluidity and accessibility, buildings need to have convenient breaks and pauses, certainly every 400 feet or sometimes less.

Buildings can be simple in their designs, but they must reflect their contribution to the character, personality, style, Complexity, elegance, charm and experience of the street. In this way, they define where we are. We want to play in our environment, celebrate great architecture and cultural achievements, and create a place that will always feel as if one has come back to, enjoy and protect. A great street is also a great theatre.

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