

APPENDIX F

# ZONING News

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## Neighborhood Planning and Its Cousins

In a perfect world, zoning follows planning. First planners develop a comprehensive plan for the region or municipality; then the zoning ordinance, design guidelines, subdivision ordinances, and other rules guiding growth are written to carry out its goals. Comprehensive plans give a broad picture of what is to happen in a community, but fall short of giving guidance to the planner or zoning administrator who must determine the fate of a single parcel. Neighborhood and section planning fill this gap, providing a more focused picture of what is to happen in a particular part of town.

### Types of Plans

The traditional neighborhood plan, such as the Avenues plan update from Salt Lake City, addresses the problems of one neighborhood. But a variation is the Douglas Area Study, produced by the city of Plano, Texas, which distinguishes between two adjacent areas. The Douglas neighborhood, the primary study area, is zoned residential, while much of the surrounding land, the secondary study area, is zoned for light industrial or commercial use.

Increasingly, adjacent neighborhoods with similar characteristics and problems are treated in one plan. A development plan for Cincinnati's Uptown area includes six neighborhoods with more than 60,000 people. The

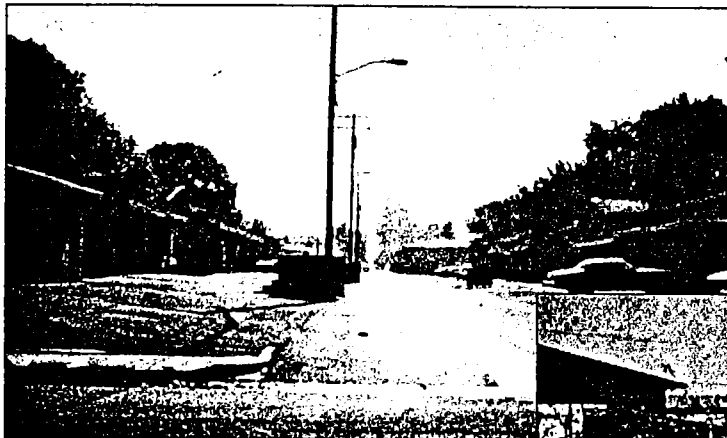
Aylesford-East University Small Area Plan, from Lexington, Kentucky, encompasses several residential neighborhoods as well as commercial areas and the University of Kentucky. Plans like this supplement a comprehensive plan, but they also occasionally resemble one.

Discrete neighborhoods, with identifiable boundaries and an image familiar to residents and outsiders, are found more often in older, urban areas and less frequently in the suburbs or newly developed places. In these cases, neighborhood planning becomes subarea or area planning. Winston-Salem and Forsyth County, North Carolina, have developed about a dozen area plans. According to principal planner Fred Luce, the agency does the plans for fast-growing sections, sections needing to be redeveloped, or those parts of the community with a new road. Whatcom County, Washington, has divided the county's western third into 10 separate planning units. These subarea plans update the comprehensive plan.

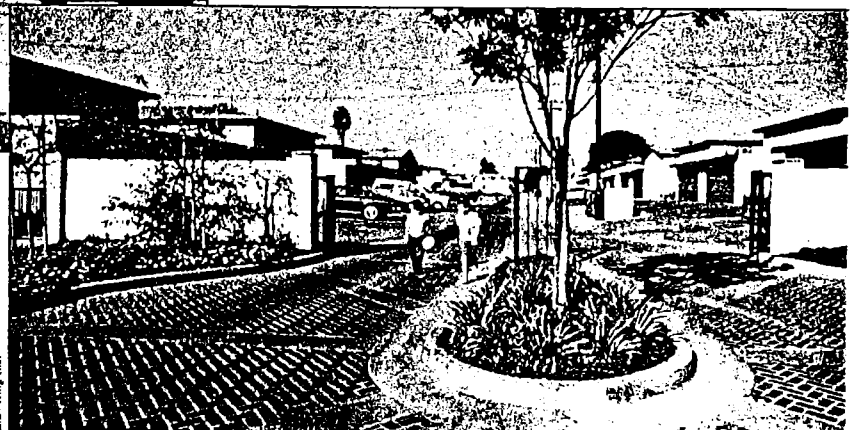
Ottawa, Ontario, includes several area and site-specific plans within the body of the comprehensive plan. While the rest of the document looks like other comprehensive plans—with elements on housing, economic development, and transportation—Ottawa also devotes much space to "theme streets" and "character areas" as well as several city neighborhoods. Theme streets are shopping areas with associated land uses, a specific physical character, and a unifying theme. Character areas have a distinct but common land-use function and a unique, physical character.

Sedona, Arizona, includes two area plans in the appendix of its comprehensive plan. They illustrate the more detailed planning the city must do to reach its goals. Unlike the rest of the plan, they do not have official city council backing.

California's state code says that specific plans should include diagrams showing locations for proposed infrastructure improvements such as sewer and water lines or the components of a transportation system. The specific area plan in California goes into more detail than the comprehensive plan



*Block-by-block neighborhood planning in Montclair, California, led to redevelopment that closed off a crime-ridden alley, above, and created an attractively landscaped "defensible space."*



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but must still be consistent with it.

All these plans are generally concerned with the same issues: housing quality; preservation; urban design; transportation; and environmental issues, including parks and recreation and the quality of open space.

### Housing Quality

The southwest sector of Montclair, California, was known as the War Zone. In 1986, most of its residents were either engaged in crime or afraid of it. Drugs were easily accessible, but playgrounds were not. Too many of the multiunit apartment buildings were in violation of local building, fire, and safety codes. Others were vacant, and still others were just unattractive because owners would not or could not do regular maintenance and tenants saw no reason to take pride in their homes.

Finally, in 1986, after a series of drug sweeps, the city recognized the need to fight blight along with crime. It formed the Housing Improvement Task Force, which included city staff members from the police, fire, community development, engineering, human services, and redevelopment departments. Since then, the task force has divided the area into sections, usually a block long, which have become a focus for improvement.

The task force takes a carrot-and-stick approach. The stick involves inspections followed by vigorous enforcement of all city codes. The community development agency, which includes planning and zoning functions, is responsible for enforcement. Coordinating enforcement efforts impresses building owners with the seriousness of the city's concern while allowing the government to streamline its procedures.

The carrot is an incentive to property owners to form an association, screen tenants, and maintain their building. The incentives, funded by the city, include sidewalk repair, security gates across alleys (former sites of drug dealing), decorative fences between units, and landscaping. To protect its interests, the city requires a newly formed property owners association to accept legal limitations on members' property. This document includes parking restrictions, sign regulations, assessments to cover the cost of maintaining common areas, provisions for drainage, and maintenance standards.

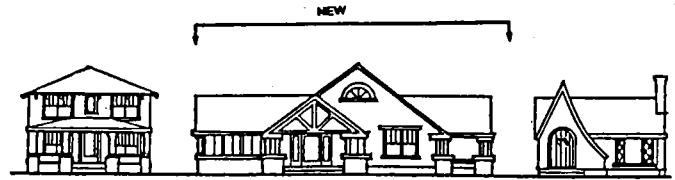
The idea is to create defensible space, a design method meant to prevent or reduce crime, according to Marilyn Staats, assistant executive director of the redevelopment agency and a task force member. It involves providing a progression of public to private space in residential areas and using architecture and landscaping to encourage residents to watch over their yards and streets.

The combined approach—using representatives from many city agencies to stop crime and blight—has made the area a better place to live and has improved housing. It benefits the city, the property owners, and the residents.

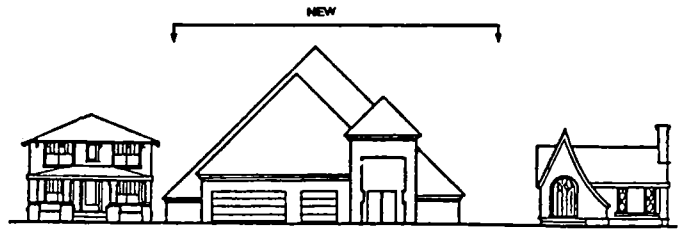
The Avenues is an attractive residential area of Salt Lake City. But, as in Montclair, there is an emphasis on strict code enforcement. The city systematically monitors the area for poor maintenance, cars parked on lawns, and illegal units. The Cincinnati Uptown plan calls for zoning ordinance enforcement as a way to limit illegal uses and reduce blight.

Philadelphia developed a plan for the three neighborhoods comprising the Frankford area. Although Frankford was in reasonable condition, planners were concerned about a high vacancy rate, a low rate of investment in home improvements, high turnover, and a high percentage of units owned and occupied by elderly people.

Much of the housing stock was at least 50 years old. The



*St. Petersburg's Neighborhood Design Manual shows the difference between attractive infill development, above, and inappropriate infill.*



plan called for a coordinated effort to market the city's various residential conservation programs, such as low-cost rehab loans or free home repair for elderly homeowners. Unfortunately, according to planner Victor Davis, there are no provisions for implementation. Still, Davis says, neighborhood groups use a list of programs included in the plan as a reference tool.

The Frankford plan encourages residents to work with the city. The area has many vacant factories, or vacant lots where factories were demolished, in residential areas zoned for manufacturing. Davis hopes the neighborhood redevelopment association will request a remapping so that the area can be more appropriately zoned residential.

### Historic Preservation and Neighborhood Conservation

Phoenix's Windsor Square neighborhood has been a special conservation district since 1978. This overlay zone provides for height limitations, setbacks, adequate parking, and landscaping. Long-range planner Cristine Hood says the plan was adopted in 1987 to foster stability in an area unique for its street design, trees, and housing design. Hood says that anyone applying for a building or zoning permit in the area must build in conformity with the plan and the overlay zone. She expects that the neighborhood association will soon apply to have Windsor Square declared a historic district.

Cincinnati is also concerned with conserving residential areas. One problem is that, in a few places in Uptown, residential pockets have been surrounded by businesses or institutions. The plan calls for protecting one neighborhood in particular, Corryville, against spot blight and the intrusion of nonresidential uses. Policies specify that those features that lend an area an identity, such as historic architecture, parks, landmarks, or views, need to be retained and enhanced.

### Traffic and Circulation

Most neighborhood or area plans include a transportation segment. Whatcom County, in its South Fork Valley subarea plan, calls for mutually supportive transportation planning and land-use planning. Phased road construction along new development is meant to prevent the leapfrog development that eats up open space. The plan encourages street design

that protects scenic roads. While the plan mentions bikeways and pedestrian trails, it directs the reader to a trails plan for more information.

Whatcom County is rather general in its recommendations for the subarea. The planning board of Forsyth County and Winston-Salem makes more specific recommendations, such as: "Old Walkertown Road should be widened to four lanes with curb and gutter and sidewalks." The element has recommendations on road improvements, public transportation, bicycle routes and greenways, and sidewalks.

The Windsor Square plan from Phoenix opposes freeway development in the area. It supports a study of area traffic patterns, sidewalks with curb ramps, and limiting on-street auto repairs. It also specifies that street improvements must include an effort to protect nearby trees.

It is interesting to note that several plans, including the Avenues plan and those from Forsyth County, cover bike and pedestrian trails in the circulation element rather than as part of parks and recreation. This, along with promotion of public transportation, shows a concern for more energy-efficient and less congesting means of transportation.

### **Parks, Recreation, and Environmental Protection**

In addition to providing a link between the comprehensive plan and the zoning ordinance, neighborhood and area plans sometimes complement their city's parks and open space plans. The Avenues plan mentions that Salt Lake City was at work on an open space plan that should help coordinate the Avenues area foothills trails. Elsewhere, the Avenues plan points to the city's parks and recreation plan as proof that the area needs more park space. Forsyth County is in the process of developing a parks plan, and the area plans point to that.

Cincinnati has a special concern. The Uptown area is very hilly. Some of the publicly owned hills are part of the park system while others are susceptible to development. The plan promotes controlling hillside development and establishing a greenway to link hillsides. The plan specifically states that it is not trying to prevent development on the hillsides, but is seeking to make buildings compatible with the setting.

The Avenues also is located in a hilly area. This plan calls for revegetation of development scars on the foothills, both to prevent erosion and to maintain the area's appearance. Because the hills provide a habitat for wildlife, the plan calls for clustered development to protect open space and to manage the deer population.

### **Urban Design**

Throughout the neighborhood and area plans, there is an emphasis on appearance: spruce up run-down housing in Montclair, keep commercial development compatible with residential uses in Windsor Square, and prevent blight in Corryville.

The Uptown plan has an element devoted to design strategies for residential, commercial, and office areas as well as for gateways into the community. The design strategies are specific to locations within Uptown. For Walnut Hills, the plan suggests creating a landscaped boulevard and adding trees along one street while closing another to limit access. Throughout the element, the plan recommends landscaping particular areas, redeveloping vacant buildings and lots, and getting rid of incompatible uses. The plan promotes screened parking lots and attractive streetscapes. Windsor Square promotes buffer zones between

residential and commercial buildings.

Two Florida communities, Hillsborough County and St. Petersburg, took a different tack. They developed guidelines that are neighborhood-focused without being neighborhood plans. St. Petersburg's *Neighborhood Design Review Manual* is an illustrated version of the city's design review ordinance. Covering scale, mass, and architectural styles, it is replete with drawings and photographs of local homes, along with information on how to build appropriate additions, fences, or new units. Although it does not focus on one particular neighborhood, it helps a homeowner or developer make changes that will respect each neighborhood's character.

William Boothe, executive planner for urban design in Hillsborough County, wrote *Principles for Good Neighborhoods*, published in January 1992. The county planning commission wanted to provide developers with the opportunity to develop in a more traditional style. The design recommendations are meant to achieve human-scale development that fosters social interaction and is not automobile-based. Boothe said the model has not yet been used, but it is an overlay zone available to developers who want to bypass the county's regular subdivision code.

The principles were worked out by a steering committee made up of designers, architects, environmentalists, and developers. Boothe thinks the option will be used soon, possibly by one of the developers who helped with the document.

Neighborhood-level design is more than just an exercise in good aesthetics. Urban design pulls together a number of concerns: housing quality, attractive environment, and ease of circulation. Thoughtful use of appropriate guidelines can help to protect stable neighborhoods, revitalize troubled areas, and get newly developed communities off to a good start. C.K.