

# M I D T O W N

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AARON JONES GATHERING IDEAS FROM LOCAL RESIDENTS.

With a reputation for good schools and the continued expansion of the Little Rock Metropolitan Area, Bryant has become one of the fastest growing cities in Arkansas. Like other expanding communities in the Sunbelt region, Bryant's open space have been developed with ad hoc residential and commercial uses, all occurring without the context of a greater regional plan. As a result, the City lacks neighborhood structure, civic gathering locations and a coherent system of open space.

Nonetheless, Bryant's physical growth is bringing an increased amount of wealth and prosperity to the area. According to the United States Census, the median family income is now above the Arkansas and Saline County averages. Moreover, the average Bryant resident is only 35 years old. With such an enviable market segment and residential and commercial growth projected for the foreseeable future, the Midtown master plan was designed to help Bryant grow sustainably and with great social and economic prosperity.

Midtown will be the first mixed-use center in the City of Bryant, which is located fifteen miles to the southwest of downtown Little Rock. The master plan was designed during an eight-day charrette, which is an interactive process during which designers, architects and planners collaborate and work with public officials, business owners and the general public. The charrette was well-attended by residents and local officials who informed the design process with continuous feedback that ultimately shaped each iteration of the master plan.



SCOTT SMITH, MIDTOWN'S TOWN ARCHITECT, SHARES HIS KNOWLEDGE OF LITTLE ROCK'S HILLCREST NEIGHBORHOOD WITH THE CHARRETTE TEAM.

In its final form, the master plan presents a diverse and viable development vision for 188 acres of suburban infill, as well as a retrofit for the site's gateway at the intersection of Commonwealth Drive, Arkansas State Highway 5, and North Reynolds Road. Using existing creeks and greenways as neighborhood edges, Midtown is comprised of three distinct neighborhoods. The mixture of commercial and residential uses within these neighborhoods will offer the City an alternative to the single-use suburbanized development now prevalent throughout the region. In addition, a public market, public pools, community hall, several church sites and a series of parks will provide the existing community with a civic center and places to gather in close proximity to housing of many sizes and types.

The master plan includes an accompanying SmartCode overlay ordinance to be reviewed by City officials. This SmartCode ordinance will serve as a regulatory tool available to the City that encourages the development of mixed-use, diverse, and pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods.



**GENERAL**



The fundamental elements of a true urbanism are the neighborhood, the district, and the corridor. Neighborhoods are urbanized areas having a balanced range of human activity. Districts are urbanized areas organized around a predominant activity. Corridors are linear systems of transportation or green space which connect or isolate the neighborhoods and districts.

Neighborhoods, districts, and corridors are complex urban elements. Suburbia, in contrast, is the result of simplified "zoning" concepts that segregate activities into enclaves. It is composed of "residential subdivisions," "shopping centers," "office parks," and "open space."

#### THE NEIGHBORHOOD:

The neighborhood can aggregate with other neighborhoods to form cities and towns, while a single Neighborhood, isolated in the landscape, is a village. The nomenclature may vary, but there is a general agreement regarding the composition of the neighborhood. The Neighborhood Unit of the 1929 New York Regional Plan, the Quartier identified by Leon Krier, the Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND), and the Transit Orientated Development (TOD) all share similar attributes:

The neighborhood has a center and an edge. The combination of a focus and a limit contribute to the social identity of the community. Both are important, but the center is essential. It is usually a public space, which may be a square, a green, or an important street intersection. It is located near the geographic center of the urbanized area unless compelled by a geographic circumstance to be elsewhere. Eccentric locations may be justified by a shoreline, a transportation corridor, or a promontory creating a view.

The center is the locus of the civic buildings. Commercial buildings such as shops and workplaces are usually associated with the center of the village. However, in the aggregations of neighborhoods which create towns and cities, commercial buildings are often at the edge, where they can intensify by combining with those of other neighborhoods.

The edge of a neighborhood varies in character. In villages, the edge is usually defined by land reserved for cultivation or conservation in a natural state. In urban areas, the neighborhood edge is often defined by boulevards or parkways.

The neighborhood has a balanced mix of activities: shopping, work, schooling, recreation, and dwelling of all types. This arrangement is particularly useful for people, young and old, who cannot depend on the automobile for mobility. The housing stock of the neighborhood serves a range of incomes. Affordable housing types include backyard cottages, apartments above shops, and rowhouses. There should also be expensive houses to attract those most able to contribute time and wealth to civic causes.



THE CITY OF  
NEIGHBORHOODS, DISTRICTS, AND CORRIDORS

The optimal size of a neighborhood is a quarter-mile from center to edge. This distance is the equivalent of a five-minute walk at an easy pace. The limited area gathers the residents within walking distance of many daily needs, including transit, which is ideally placed at a central node in conjunction with convenience retail.

Neighborhood streets of varying types are detailed to provide equitability for the pedestrian, the bicycle, and the automobile. The concurrent provision of sidewalks, street trees, and on-street parking slows the automobile and increases pedestrian activity, encouraging the casual meetings that form the bonds of community. Neighborhood streets are laid out to create efficient blocks for building sites and to shorten pedestrian routes. A fine network of streets and roads provides multiple routes that diffuse traffic. This pattern keeps the local traffic away from the long-range corridors.

The neighborhood gives priority to the creation of public space and to the appropriate location of civic buildings. Private buildings form a disciplined edge delineating the public spaces and the private block interior. Useful public spaces such as formal squares, informal parks, and small playgrounds provide places for gathering and recreation. Honorific sites are reserved for public buildings which reinforce the civic spirit of the community and provide places of assembly for educational, social, cultural, and religious activities.

#### THE DISTRICT:

The district is an urbanized area that is functionally specialized. Typical examples are theater districts, capitol areas, and college and sports campuses. Other districts accommodate large scale transportation or manufacturing uses, such as airports, container

terminals, and refineries. Although districts preclude the full range of activities of a neighborhood, they are not always the single-activity zones of suburbia. A district allows multiple activities to support its primary identity.

The structure of the district parallels that of its neighborhood: an identifiable focus encourages orientation and identity, and clear boundaries facilitate the formation of special taxing or management organizations. Like the neighborhood, attention to the character of the public space reinforces the community of recurrent users, which encourages the pedestrian, supports transit viability, and ensures security. Districts benefit from transit systems, and should be located within a regional network.

**THE CORRIDOR:**

The corridor is the connector or the isolator of neighborhoods and districts. Corridors are composed of natural and technical components ranging from wildlife trails to rail lines. The corridor is not the haphazard residual “open space” buffering the enclaves of suburbia, but a proactive civic element characterized by its continuity. It is defined by the boundaries of neighborhoods and districts and provides entry to them.

The trajectory of a transportation corridor is determined by its intensity. Highways and heavy rail corridors should remain tangent to towns and cities and enter only the industrial districts. Light rail corridors and buses may be incorporated into the boulevards at the edges of neighborhoods. As such, they are detailed for pedestrian use and accommodate building sites. Bus corridors may pass into neighborhood centers on small conventional streets.

Green corridors or greenways can be formed by the systematic accretion of recreational open spaces, such as parks, playing fields, schoolyards, and golf courses. These continuous natural spaces should gradually flow to the rural edges, connecting the regional ecosystem. The transportation lines may be located within continuous parkways, combining both types of corridor and providing long-distance walking and biking trails.

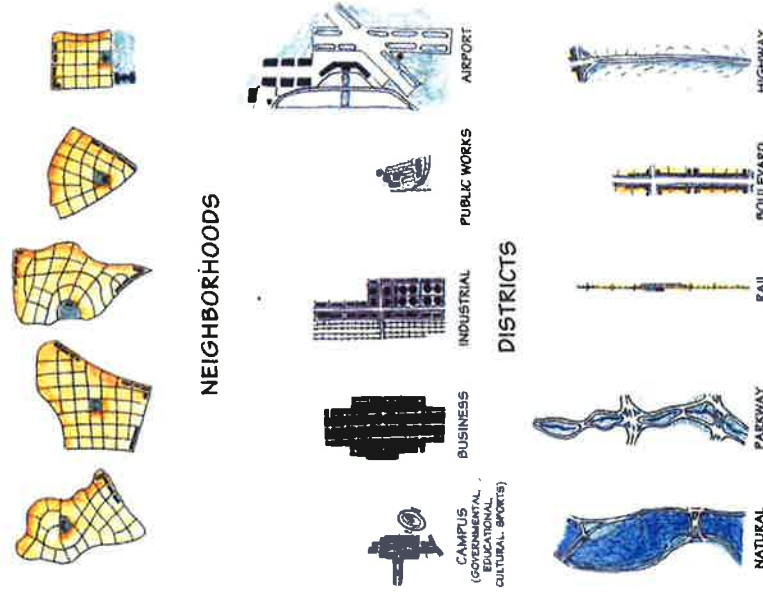
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**TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD PRINCIPLES:**

There are two patterns of urbanism in North America: the Traditional Neighborhood, which was the model from the first settlements to World War II, and Suburban Sprawl, which has been the model since then. They are similar in their initial capacity to accommodate people and their activities; the principal difference is that Suburban Sprawl contains environmental, social, and economic deficiencies which inevitably choke sustained growth. The Traditional Neighborhood has many physical, social and economic attributes that do not exist in suburbia.

The Neighborhood is a comprehensive planning increment: when clustered with others, it becomes a town; when standing free in the landscape, it becomes a village. The Neighborhood varies in population and density to accommodate localized conditions.

The Traditional Neighborhood has several positive consequences:



By bringing most of the activities of daily living into walking distance, everyone (especially the elderly and the young) gains independence of movement.

By reducing the number and length of automobile trips, traffic congestion is minimized, the expenses of road construction are limited, and air pollution is reduced.

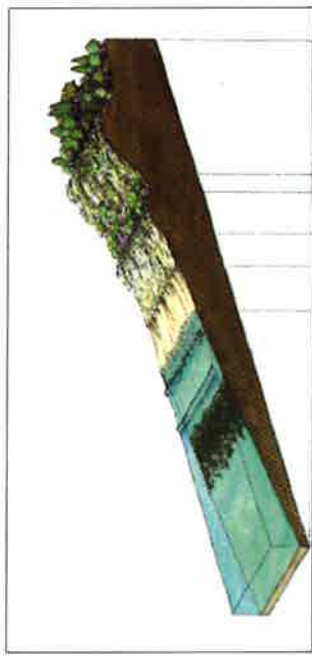
By providing walkable streets and squares of comfortable scale with defined spatial quality, neighbors can come to know each other and to watch over their collective security.

By providing appropriate building concentrations at easy walking distances from bus stops, public transit becomes a viable alternative to the automobile.

By providing a full range of housing types and work places, age and economic classes are integrated and the bonds of an authentic community are formed. Even affordable housing occurs naturally and in a highly integrated manner. The affordable housing looks like the market-rate housing, using similar exterior materials, windows, and building forms. Affordable housing is not segregated



7. That each neighborhood should incorporate a variety of dwelling types, such that younger and older persons, single households and families may be housed;
8. That each dwelling should be permitted to have an ancillary unit for use as a rental apartment;
9. That an elementary school should be available, or a site reserved, within one mile of most dwellings;
10. That there are small playgrounds quite near every dwelling, not more than one-eighth of a mile;
11. That thoroughfares within the neighborhood be a network, connecting wherever possible to adjacent thoroughfares in order to provide a variety of itineraries and disperse traffic;
12. That thoroughfares should be designed to slow traffic, creating an environment appropriate for pedestrians and bicyclists as well as automobiles;
13. That building frontages should collectively support pedestrian streetscapes and mask most parking lot.
14. That certain prominent sites are reserved for civic buildings. Buildings for meeting, education, religion or culture are located at the termination of street vistas or at the Neighborhood center.



THE NATURAL TRANSECT FEATURES A RANGE OF NATURAL ENVIRONMENTS.

The Transect, in its origins (Von Humboldt 1790), is a geographical cross-section of a region used to reveal a sequence of environments. Originally, it was used to analyze natural ecologies, showing varying characteristics through different zones such as shores, wetlands, plains and uplands.

For human environments, this cross-section can be used to identify a set of habitats that vary by their level and intensity of urban character, a continuum that ranges from rural to urban. In Transect planning, this range of environments is the basis for organizing the components of the built world: building, lot, land use, street, and all other physical elements of the human habitat.

and is never clustered in large numbers. Housing can be provided above retail establishments. This type of dwelling can be provided for the cost of construction alone, because the cost of land can be assigned to the retail component of the building.

By providing suitable civic buildings and spaces, democratic initiatives are encouraged and the balanced evolution of society is facilitated.

The social and environmental benefits of a New Urbanist community, or Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) results from certain physical and organizational characteristics. An authentic Neighborhood includes most of the following:

1. That development should preserve sensitive natural and cultural areas as permanent open space;
2. That the basic increment of development should be the walkable, diverse pedestrian shed, forming a neighborhood;
3. That each neighborhood should have a discernible center to serve as a community gathering place. This center would also contain a transit stop;
4. That the pedestrian shed be a five or ten-minute walk to the neighborhood center such that pedestrians may have access to transit. This distance averages one-quarter of a mile;
5. That there should be shops within, or in proximity to the neighborhood, sufficiently varied to satisfy ordinary daily household needs. A convenience store is the most important among them;
6. That the neighborhood should incorporate a variety of places to work, including those that enables work at the dwelling;



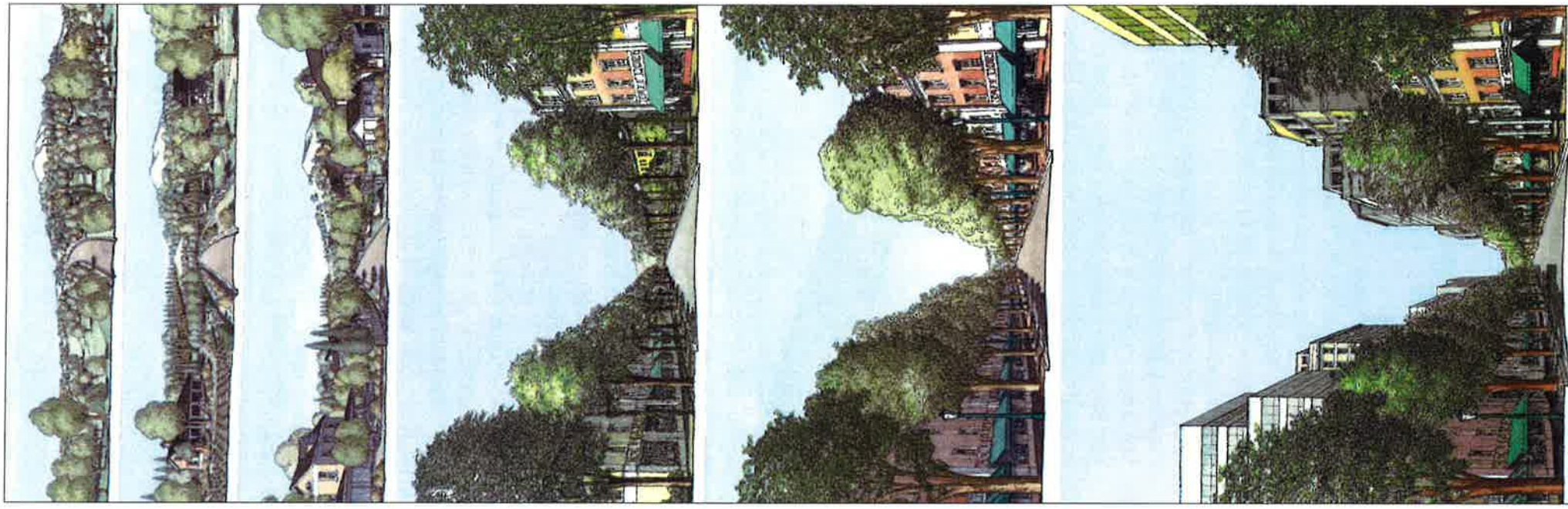
### TRANSECT PLANNING

One of the key objectives of transect planning is creation of immersive environments. Successful immersive environments are based on the selection and arrangement of all the components that contribute to a particular type of environment. Each environment, or Transect Zone, is comprised of elements that support and intensify its locational character. Through the Transect, planners are able to specify different urban contexts that have the function and intensity appropriate to their locations. For instance, a farmhouse would not contribute to the immersive quality of an urban core, whereas a high-rise apartment building would. Wide streets and open swales find a place on the Transect in more rural areas while narrow streets and curbs are appropriate for urban areas. Based on local practices, most elements can be locally calibrated to contribute to the regional and vernacular character of a given environment.

The continuum of the Transect, when subdivided, lends itself to the creation of zoning categories. Six have been identified. These Transect zones (T-zones) display more-or-less fixed identifiable characteristics, from the most rural and natural environment (T-1) to the most urban environment (T-6). The standards specified by the zoning categories overlap, reflecting the successional ecozones of natural and human communities.

The Transect is evident in two ways: (1) it exists in place and (2) it evolves over time. Yet, the evolution of communities over time is the unforeseen element in urbanism. A hamlet may evolve into a village and then into a town; its T-zones increasing in density and intensity over a period of many years.

The Transect Zones impose the discipline of the distribution of densities and building types throughout the plan. They also create a high degree of flexibility as several building types can be applied in every Transect Zone. The Regulating Plan also shows the form and location of public open spaces.



A TRANSECT OF STREETSCAPES, RANGING FROM RURAL (ABOVE) TO URBAN.