

Great neighborhoods?

What they are! What they are NOT!

What they are not!

SHOPPING OR WORK?

Neighborhoods are NOT a commercial strip, a box store, shopping mall, or an industrial park, no matter how many times they are called “shopping village” or “green acres estates”. These are places to buy things or to work. A neighborhood might require shops nearby, but only because we use those things to make our neighborhood great.

WALKABILITY

Great neighborhoods are NOT hostile to walking. If we must drive to local amenities like grocery and simple conveniences, that puts us into a vehicle away from visiting or interacting with those neighbors who actually comprise the lifeblood of a neighborhood, which is, actually, people. Neighborhoods must be walkable.

BARE MINIMUMS?

A neighborhood is NOT place that provides a bare minimum of satisfactory living conditions. That is not a satisfactory goal of 21st Century habitat. It is not enough to provide basic utilities like clean water, garbage pickup, snow removal, or street cleaning, adequate car parking areas, a few sidewalks, and so forth. Those are the bare minimums for decent habitat. They are far from enough for a great neighbourhood.

What they are!

WALKABLE

1. A great neighborhood must be a place where people have an opportunity to walk safely, with meaningful destinations.

AMENITIES

2. Great neighborhoods also need nearby amenities for those residents to meet socially, shop for conveniences, and recreate. For example groceries and eateries, quality schools, a local park and walking or biking trail. If seniors, teens or toddlers are nearby, great neighborhoods should contain easily accessible playgrounds for children, teens and adults alike. Some amenities, like small grocers, will be available within a short walk. Others, like a hardware store, may require a short drive.

DIVERSITY

3. To be really great, if at all possible, great neighborhoods will benefit from different kinds of people, ages, incomes, and ethnicities to give it cultural flavor. Such diversity will provide opportunities not available elsewhere. It helps neighbors learn about, interact with, teach and be taught by, different kinds of people from different walks of life.

COMMERCIAL FACILITIES

4. There may have been a time long ago when a cluster of commercial areas did represent a communal gathering place where people socialized in the neighborhood. Box stores and regional malls ended that.

Great neighborhoods have access to well used, locally-relevant, and walkable commercial areas. Local coffee shops, grocers, pharmacies, hair salons and barber shops, bookstores/music stores, neighborhood pubs, and other neighborhood-oriented commercial activities provide an important service to great neighborhoods.

CO-OPERATIVE DECISIONS

5. There will be an inventory of amenities that make a neighborhood work for residents, but they must be part of the decision-making process determine the extent of those amenities. A great neighborhood will have a well-understood collaborative process for residents to gather in common cause.

NETWORKED LAND USES

6. One of the opportunities available in great neighborhoods is a land use balance with a range of amenities and activities. However that depends on whether we mean the street, the block or the cluster of connected blocks. It is unlikely a street alone will have the space to contain more than one of two amenities. So in a great neighborhood an inventory of amenities and activities emerges from a) when it is

collaboratively decided with residents, and b) on a block and in a connected cluster of immediate blocks creating a complex network of neighborhood relationships.

MOBILITY

7. Great neighborhoods have access to a safe, efficient network of transportation options. Those options should include walkability, through sidewalks and paths, bicycle trails, sheltered, clean and interesting public transit stops within a 10 minute walk of anywhere in that neighborhood, and vehicle roadways narrow enough to slow traffic and give way to pedestrians.

AN ANNUAL NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY AND DEVELOPMENT PLAN

8. Typically neighborhood goals, services, and safety is handled by outsiders - police, city hall, and utility companies. A great neighborhood will have in place a process to create its own annual safety and development plan. A group of resident volunteers, along with professionals like police and planners, will assist with the development of that plan. Those volunteers will receive adequate training and resources from the municipal government to establish their plan. They will also be solicited or selected by a random and democratic process so that anyone in the neighborhood can participate. The entire neighborhood will have an opportunity to provide feedback on that annual plan.

A PLAN WITH A VISION

9. A great neighborhood will have an opportunity to co-create a safety and development vision for what it wants to achieve. Those goals should be measurable and realistic. For example the Safety and Development plan may aim for a 25% reduction in vehicle related crime. It may also aim for a 20% increase in neighborhood social activities and a 50% decrease in vehicle collisions. Having input on such a plan provides everyone in the neighborhood with an opportunity to create their own community destiny with, and by, other neighbors, rather than having those things imposed by others.

BOUNDARIES

10. Great neighborhoods know who they are - they have boundaries. One obstacle to creating cohesive neighborhoods is that many neighborhood boundaries are decided by those outside the neighborhood, for historical reasons, or due to geographical boundaries like railways or rivers. Sometimes boundaries constrain residents into one image of themselves or another. Though the annual Safety and Development plans a great neighborhood should offer residents the opportunity to dialogue with others inside and outside their neighborhood about where neighborhoods start and end. Boundaries should be flexible to allow those in nearby places to join or depart, should they wish.

NEIGHBORHOOD HUBS

11. Great neighborhoods have ample land use for the public realm - sometimes called community spaces. Traditionally these include community centers, but too many

such places are underused by most residents. Thus, great neighborhoods have a geographical center, or nexus, for shared cultural and social activities, for the whole neighborhood. A great neighborhood will have city support to sponsor such events regularly through the annual Safety and Development Plan. These events include farmers markets, music events, cultural festivals, social gatherings, and so forth. A great neighborhood will have such events in the common hub area regularly throughout the year.

SOCIAL COHESION

12. Above all, in great neighborhoods residents have a sense of place and social cohesion with each other. They may be proud of some local event, sports team or local hero. They feel safe from crime because they are relatively free from crime. They willingly participate in local events or volunteer for resolving some local need or problem. They know that their neighborhood is inclusive, not exclusive, and their life is enriched by living in that place.