Transforming the suburban realm: A call for diversification in the Las Vegas home-building process

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TRANSFORMING THE SUBURBAN REALM: A CALL
FOR DIVERSIFICATION IN THE LAS VEGAS
HOME-BUILDING PROCESS

by

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ABSTRACT

Transforming the Suburban Realm: A Call for Diversification in the Las Vegas Home-Building Process

by

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More U.S. residents live within suburban boundaries than they do the central cities and rural regions combined—creating a need for suburban design methods that adequately meet the desires of the suburban population. The design of suburban neighborhoods over the past several decades, however, has not adequately met the needs of its residents. This dilemma has only intensified over the past several years because of an increasingly varied group of potential homebuyers. Local, state, and federal governments—as well as land developers, planners, and architects—need to raise awareness to the issues facing suburban design. By incorporating strategic design elements into the development process, neighborhood designs can more efficiently begin to address the diverse needs of the suburban population. This study acknowledges these changing needs while addressing community, nature, and economic feasibility issues as they relate to suburban neighborhoods.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ABSTRACT** ...................................................................................................................................... iii

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS** ............................................................................................................... v

**CHAPTER 1** INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................... 1  
  Problem Statement .................................................................................................................... 1  
  Hypothesis .................................................................................................................................. 2  
  Methodology .............................................................................................................................. 3  
  Literature Review ..................................................................................................................... 6

**CHAPTER 2** SUBURBIA IN THE U.S.: FROM THE POST WWII ERA ON... AND BEYOND ......................................................... 16

**CHAPTER 3** THE NEED FOR COMMUNITY BELONGING: CREATING A VARIED GROUP OF SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOODS TO MEET THE DIFFERENT NEEDS OF A GROWING CITY ... 23

**CHAPTER 4** THE LANDSCAPE: INTERWOVEN INTO OUR LIVES... OR SO IT SHOULD BE .................................................................................... 43

**CHAPTER 5** ECONOMIC FEASIBILITY: HOW ALTERNATIVE HOUSING SOLUTIONS CAN BECOME A REALITY ........................................ 52

**CHAPTER 6** CASE STUDIES ........................................................................................... 66

**CHAPTER 7** SUMMARY OF FINDINGS / FINAL THOUGHTS .......................... 80

**BIBLIOGRAPHY** ......................................................................................................................... 94

**VITA** ..................................................................................................................................................98
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

In recent years, the Las Vegas Valley has seen a dramatic growth in population, and in no area has such growth been more prevalent than in the suburbs. Where there were once vast amounts of open space, the Valley is now filling to its edges, leaving only modest portions of the native desert landscape as a result. In addition, this current influx of growth and development within the suburbs appears to lack, to a great extent, creative decision making with regard to diversified neighborhood design. This lack of creative decision making can partly be attributed to the underutilization of qualified architects (landscape architects included) in neighborhood design projects. Additionally, suburban land developers recognize that current models for building residential subdivisions generate substantial profit and, consequently, continue building in the same manner, often without regard to the evolving needs of today’s society. Because of these circumstances, few housing options are being left open to an ever-increasingly diversified group of potential home-buyers.

Can land developers create alternative methods for neighborhood design that are economically feasible? Are alternative methods even worth examining? At a gathering of panelists at the Art Institute of Chicago in 2000, Herbert Muschamp,
former architecture critic for the *New York Times*, said, “I know it’s important to be aware of what’s going on in suburban America, but you know, who cares?” It is this manner of thinking that has contributed to many of the problems facing suburban neighborhoods. After all, it is in the suburbs where the majority of Americans live, work, recreate, and learn (Schmitz, 2)—so they should not be deemed unimportant.

Hypothesis

Because of the issues previously described in the “Problem Statement” regarding the current state of suburbia in Las Vegas and many of the other major metropolitan areas in the Southwestern states, it has become increasingly necessary that land developers actively seek alternative design models for suburban neighborhoods—both on the suburban edge and within a suburb’s more established regions. To accomplish this task, it is important that any alternative solution work with the land developer’s economic model. By exploring and identifying the current needs of today’s potential home-buyers—along with studying the past and current living conditions of suburbia and the methods used by land developers to create these conditions—one can begin to generate alternative design methods that can be implemented in the arrangement of new neighborhoods—diversified neighborhoods that can fulfill the different needs of Valley residents while at the same time fulfilling the developer’s economic needs. Although the actual design of a home is significant to any resident’s lifestyle, it is the intent of this study is to focus on the design of the neighborhood.

While it is certain to take some additional time and money in the initial stages, those developers who are the first to find successful methods by which to
accommodate the varied and always-changing demands of home-owners could easily find themselves with a strong advantage over their competitors who simply continue with the static methods so often used today. To present this point of view, the following topics will be addressed as they relate to neighborhood livability and land developer issues: a brief history of suburbia in the U.S.; the current state of suburbia in the U.S.—mainly within the Southwestern states; the importance of neighborhood design that successfully reflects the diverse needs of its residents; landscape/nature issues; economic feasibility; and an exploration/critique of relevant case studies. Although the ever-decreasing amount of available space in Las Vegas could indicate that the city may not be capable of using such solutions to their full extent, this study could also be used as a guide for cities in earlier stages of growth.

Methodology

"Suburbia. ... Always instantly recognizable though never entirely familiar" (Silverstone, i). For the purposes of this study, the term suburbia should be understood within a U.S. context. But because modern suburbs have evolved over time and now comprise a more complex environment than they did in the past, any one concise definition is not readily plausible. It is still possible, however, to reach a general understanding of what characterizes a suburb. Suburbs exist beyond the urban edge; they are places distinct from the city and countryside. While the current urban edge of Las Vegas is less identifiable (or more irregular) than it is in many of the other major U.S. cities, it should be noted that the uniqueness of the suburb does not simply exist in geographical terms: "each suburb, in its distinctive fashion,
combines aspects of the city, its urbanity, convenience, and energies, with aspects of
an idealized nature, its beauty, physical elements, and the psychological
[revitalization]" (Girling, 8). The suburb attempts to reconnect to the natural
environment while retaining a grasp of the technological advances of modern times.
Sadly, the current state of suburbia does not always offer the elements listed in the
previous descriptions—not only does much of suburbia lack important city and urban
elements, it often lacks what it most emphatically boasts to offer—Nature. It can,
however, offer such elements if certain goals are set and achieved; such goals will be
covered within this study.

Also important to the characterization of suburbia is population and building
density. In suburbia, such densities (housing densities in the suburbs average
approximately three to four units per acre) are typically lower than those of the
central city, but higher than those of the country. While apartment complexes,
condominiums, townhouses, and other similar forms of higher density residences are
present, it is the single-family detached house that continues to dominate the suburban
landscape.

More recently, suburbia has quickly begun to evolve—it has matured and is
searching for new identities. Suburbs are now often self-sufficient, which is a
departure from their initial dependence on the central city. The demography is also
changing at a much quicker pace than in the past. Where they were once a place of
residence mainly for families that included a father, mother, and children, suburbs are
increasingly becoming “home” to families without children, to singles, and to other
non-typical family units (Schmitz, 3) (percentages to be given later in the study).
While suburban studies among scholars and design professionals have often been realized through the observation and actual experience of suburbanites, the more theoretical aspects of suburban life have been given somewhat less attention (Baldassare, 478). Many of the planning methods used to form suburbia have not integrated important urban characteristics, and while suburbia is a departure from the central city style of living and the abundance of urban features so often present within the central city, it would be desirable to include relevant aspects of urban form within suburban neighborhoods. This study provides information regarding the actual experience of recent suburban life, as well as the potential for progress in the future. Perhaps even more important, however, is this study’s exploration of the more theoretical implications of suburbia.

In order to maintain a high standard with regard to the information collected, scholarly journals found through the Journal Storage (JSTOR) database have been used extensively in finding articles, demographic studies, surveys, and images. Using JSTOR and the authors found there as a platform, it was then possible to find books and more recent articles prepared by many of the same authors, as well as their peers. This process proved to be beneficial to this study in that information from many of the leading authorities regarding suburbia was then more readily attainable. The subject matter deals directly with suburban history in addition to its current models—both the good and the bad—as well as interrelated urban issues. Planning, community needs, and Nature/landscape issues as they relate to suburban design have been explored in pursuit of alternative suburban design methods. Research has been dedicated to suburban growth that occurs on the peripheries of existing suburban
communities as well as the opportunities that exist for infill projects within them. Also important to this study is the exploration of feasibility with regards to the alternative solutions being examined. To assist in accomplishing this task, case studies and diagrams derived from them are also utilized. The objective of such methods is to assist in determining the economic and social feasibility of the alternative design solutions proposed by this study.

Literature Review

Just as overwhelming as the vast suburban growth that has been prominent in the U.S. is the amount of literature covering it. From the middle of the twentieth century until today, suburbia and its effects on the city have been, and are, a common topic among authors, scholars, design professionals, and even the public in general. Because of the abundance of information, anyone conducting research in this field should be critical of the literature which they eventually use.

Suburban History

Although the main objective of this study has been to find alternative solutions to neighborhood design, it was initially necessary to research the history of suburbia in the U.S., as well as any current trends. Much of the current suburban research has been influenced, in some form or another, by Kenneth T. Jackson's *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* and Robert Fishman's *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia*—each written in the 1980's. Both books look more deeply into the history of suburbia than does this study, but they do provide a useful account of the more recent swift rise of suburbia in the United States that
followed World War II—which does correspond to the breadth of this particular study. Each of these works provide the reader with a good understanding of the forces that contributed to so much suburban growth—namely government incentives, the freeway system, cheap land and building techniques, and the generally perceived decline of the central city. Although both books examine much of the same historical information on suburbia, their conclusions differ in that Fishman argues that the suburbia that Jackson described has ceased to exist—rather it has evolved into something else.

In 1991, Joel Garreau authored *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier*, a book that offered a different point of view than the majority of work that had previously been written regarding suburbia. What makes Garreau’s work noteworthy is that in a field of research dominated by information portraying the drawbacks of the suburbs, he remains optimistic about the evolution of the suburbs into what he refers to as “Edge Cities.” Garreau contends that while these “new” cities typically occur on the periphery of larger, urban cities, they now largely exist independently of the central city from which they were spawned. For the most part, the inclusion of the workplace within their boundaries is what differentiates these Edge Cities from their suburban predecessors. Garreau’s account looks at several major metropolitan U.S. cities and how multiple Edge Cities have developed around each of them. His principal focus is to understand who “we” (specifically the American people) are, and why. “*Edge City* is hardly a theoretical work,” writes Garreau, “I am a reporter, not a critic. The characters in this book are real. . . . That is why *Edge City*, at heart, is a saga of ourselves” (xiv).
Providing a more recent historical account of suburbia is Dolores Hayden with her book, *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000*. What is notably interesting about Hayden’s book is that it identifies and describes seven periods of suburban growth since the early 19th century: (1) borderlands; (2) picturesque enclaves; (3) streetcar buildouts; (4) mail-order and self-built suburbs; (5) sitcom suburbs; (6) edge nodes; and (7) rural fringes (ix). Each of these periods is differentiated by a unique grouping of architectural styles, building techniques, marketing approaches, and maybe most importantly, the general frame of mind of the population—all of which are unique to each time period. Also unique to Hayden’s work is the amount of information that she offers regarding the suburban experience of both men and women.

**Neighborhood Design/Community Belonging**

Just as the work of Jackson, Fishman, and Hayden is relevant to the history of suburbia, so too is their work relevant to neighborhood design principles. Not only do they provide information regarding past suburban neighborhoods, each author, to some extent, offers ideas for new approaches to suburban design. More recently, however, new design movements have appeared that are currently creating a stir in the design profession for the built environment. One of the goals of this study is to review these latest movements—namely *New Urbanism* and *Smart Growth*—and apply any elements that were found to be beneficial.

The concept of New Urbanism began to be established in the late 1980’s to early 1990’s. Two of the leading founders for the movement, Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, have had a major influence not only by means of the communities that
they have designed, but by their written works as well. In *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream*, Duany and Plater-Zyberk critique the current state of suburbia and offer a descriptive account of their New Urbanist solutions. Based on Werner Hegemann and Elbert Peets' *The American Vitruvius: An Architects' Handbook of Civic Art*, Duany and Plater-Zyberk also offer the work, *New Civic Art: Elements of Town Planning*, which provides an account of the most recent—as well as many earlier—successes in town planning.

Another important contributor to the New Urbanist movement is Peter Calthorpe. Like Duany and Plater-Zyberk, Calthorpe is a well-known practitioner of New Urbanism who has also written several books. In *The Next American Metropolis: Ecology, Community, and the American Dream*, Calthorpe provides an account of the American City as a whole—i.e., the central city, the suburbs, and Nature. He argues that "the three are inseparable and the failure to treat them as a whole is endemic to many of our problems" (9). The book is of much use to New Urbanist supporters as it offers insight to Calthorpe's philosophy, as well as provides design guidelines and actual projects.

In an effort to bring together the most prominent minds in the New Urbanist movement, Peter Katz authored *The New Urbanism: Toward an Architecture of Community*. With essays by Todd W. Bressi, Elizabeth Moule, Stefanos Polyzoides, and the aforementioned Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Calthorpe, Katz also includes numerous case studies—providing one of the most complete overviews ever written on New Urbanism. In 1993, Katz organized the *Congress for the New Urbanism*, and the New Urbanist movement has progressively gained strength ever since.
Perhaps playing off of the recognition of New Urbanism, the Smart Growth movement has recently become popular within the design profession. While aspects of Smart Growth have been around for some time, it has only been recently—beginning in the mid-1990's—that use of the term "smart growth" has become popular in proposing an antidote to sprawl. Due to the increase in interest with regard to smart growth, various organizations have been created. One of the most well-known is *Smart Growth America*, which is a coalition of more than 100 organizations across the U.S. *Smart Growth America* was initially formed in the mid-1990's but not officially put into place until the year 2000—with the familiar *American Planning Association* being a main contributor.

In the short time that the Smart Growth movement has been around, a number of books, articles, and essays have been written regarding the subject. In *Solving Sprawl: Models of Smart Growth in Communities Across America*, authors F. Kaid Benfield, Jutka Terris, and Nancy Glendening present a review of actual projects that have utilized Smart Growth principles. Unique to this book, one-third of its pages are dedicated to "smart conservation"—offering substantial information to which other books only allude.

In 2002, within a three month period from April to June, three significant books were released that have made an impact on the Smart Growth movement—each employing a different approach to convey their message. The first was Oliver Gillham’s *The Limitless City: A Primer on the Urban Sprawl Debate*, in which Gillham offers a comprehensive account of sprawl, Smart Growth, and the future of our cities. The second book, *Making Smart Growth Work*, commissioned by the
Urban Land Institute and written by Douglas R. Porter, is more of an approach/solution-themed book in which Porter focuses directly on Smart Growth issues. Finally, the third book, *Smart Growth: Form and Consequences*, is a compilation of essays written by many of today's most influential minds in the sprawl/smart growth field. Edited by Terry S. Szold and Armando Carbonell, this book is useful in that it does not simply provide a single viewpoint on Smart Growth issues, but offers an array of insights that can be appreciated by the well-informed Smart Growth advocate/opponents, as well as by the casual reader.

**Nature/Landscape**

The relationship of people with Nature is something that has existed since the beginning of the human race, and with the rapid pace of construction throughout the world, the need to deal with this relationship in a better way is as important as ever. While much of the literature previously discussed deals with Nature in some form—mainly as it relates to suburban issues—it was important that this study also researched work that was directly centered on Nature and landscape issues.

One such work, Ian L. McHarg's *Design with Nature*, originally written in 1969, provides a basis for just such research. Just as McHarg is commonly considered to be one of the leading authorities on the environment and ecological planning, *Design with Nature* is commonly considered to be one the most significant books in those same fields. In addressing the need for such a book, McHarg writes:

*Design with Nature* aspired to satisfy several obvious [design] deficiencies.

The first was the absence of any knowledge of the environment in planning—this was a totally applied socio-economic process. The next omission was the
lack of integration within the environmental sciences. Geologists, meteorologists, hydrologists, and soil scientists were informed in physical science, unknowing of life. Ecology and the biological sciences were only modestly aware of physical processes. Scientists in general had not revealed any interest in values nor in planning; and finally, there was no theory attempting to address the problem of human adaptations. *Design with Nature* made a contribution to each of these concerns. It did provide a method by which environmental data could be incorporated into the planning process. The current view of ecological studies was expanded to include the full panoply of environmental sciences. The subject of values was presented as crucial to the environmental movement, and finally, a theory was presented.

It appears as though McHarg was largely successful in his attempt to “satisfy [these] obvious deficiencies” as his process of landscape analysis has proven to be instrumental in the development of the modern era’s planning methods.

Another influential book that primarily deals with Nature is Ann Whiston Spirn’s *The Language of Landscape*. The imagery that Spirn is able to invoke in the reader’s mind is remarkable. Her writings often read like a poetic invitation for planners, designers, and society in general to be attentive to the landscape and the effects it can have on the human body and mind. In addition to her imaginative style of writing, Spirn is also able to incorporate practical uses of the landscape into the design of the city. “The language of landscape is the principal language in which I think and act: my conviction that there is such a language arises first from that fact” (Spirn, 4).
While this statement—that the language of landscape is her principal language—surely does not apply to everyone, it would be of great value to anyone to become more familiar with such a language.

In 1994, around the same time that New Urbanism and Smart Growth were gaining substantial recognition, Cynthia L. Girling and Kenneth I. Helphand released their book, *Yard, Street, Park: The Design of Suburban Open Space*. Not only does this book provide a historical account of suburbia in the United States—as do many of the books listed in this literature review—it also offers alternative methods for neighborhood design in which open space is extensively utilized. As the title suggests, the “yard, street, and park” all offer themselves as opportunities for open space within suburban neighborhoods. Unique to this work is the attention given to the street as an open space and not just as a vein for vehicular movement.

Several years later, Simon Swaffield edited a collection of essays from prominent landscape architects and theorists in his book, *Theory in Landscape Architecture: A Reader*. Perhaps no other book written about landscape and design brings together so many of the key minds in the field of landscape architecture—from the aforementioned Ian L. McHarg and Ann Whiston Spirn to James Corner and Marc Treib, Swaffield’s collection is useful because it focuses on design theories of landscape architecture and not its practical applications. Swaffield’s reason for this—while “partly pragmatic”—is also due to the valuable work already available regarding planning and the practical applications of landscape architecture (xi).
Economic Feasibility

In researching economic feasibility, it quickly became apparent that the number of sources available is significantly fewer than the number of sources available regarding the previous subtopics. The several sources that are available, however, contain a vast amount of information regarding economic feasibility and its role in the home-building industry.

Leading the way in documenting the latest trends in urban design is the Urban Land Institute. Their books, *Real Estate Development: Principles and Process*, *Real Estate Market Analysis*, and *The New Shape of Suburbia: Trends in Residential Development*, provide many of the principles and analysis regarding new trends—they also offer data concerning both the sociologic and economic feasibility of these new trends. In addition, these books include a detailed process with which one can evaluate whether or not a new—and possibly untested—project-type is feasible.

Another organization dedicated to the exploration of market needs is the market research group *American LIVES*. In their book, *Community Preferences: What the Buyers Really Want in Design, Features, and Amenities*, they use both qualitative and quantitative studies in an effort to examine the diverse needs of potential homebuyers—a crucial step in determining economic feasibility.

By investigating both the good and the bad examples of suburban development, one is able to formulate a more balanced approach to the design process. In Reid Ewing's book, *Best Development Practices*, he accomplishes just such a task. Ewing's ideas, with the assistance of case studies, provide evidence that even alternative and previously untested development methods can be economically
rewarding to developers, in addition to the improvement that they can make on a community.

With all the information regarding the history of suburbia, in addition to the information on its current and possible future trends, there is hope that today’s developers, planners, and design professionals can offer more diverse options to potential home-buyers. As the suburban population continues to increase, it will become even more important that those involved in suburban projects have updated information from which they can make educated decisions—one can therefore hope that the innovative minds in this field of study will continue to offer their written help.
CHAPTER 2

SUBURBIA IN THE U.S.: FROM THE POST

WWII ERA ON... AND BEYOND

The word “suburbia” can invoke a multitude of emotions and interpretations. It has become a highly contested word in our current society—ask anyone what they think of suburbia and you are likely to receive a direct response. For the purpose of this study, suburbia is examined in the form of suburban neighborhoods in the United States from the time of World War II until today. A portion dedicated to the future of suburbia is also necessary to explore alternate solutions to existing problems, and is integrated throughout each chapter.

Although the concept of suburbia, in some form, has been used for centuries, it wasn’t until the mid-1900’s that residential suburbia began to be viewed as the model for housing for an increasing number of U.S. families. This was especially apparent following World War II and the success of Levittown in New York. After the war, the servicemen and women arrived home to find that the war had had a harsh influence on many aspects of the U.S. economy. “Wartime shortages of everything had crippled the housing industry. Returning veterans, their libidos fully charged with the ambitions that would create the baby boom, found themselves doubled up with parents and in-laws.... In those years, the American housing industry was not so
much an industry as a loose affiliation of local builders, any one of whom completed an average of four houses a year” (Lacayo, website). It was at this time that the U.S. government created the G.I. Bill in an effort to help the servicemen and women get a college education. This led to better jobs for such individuals and the necessary money to be able to buy a home.

William J. Levitt, a homebuilder in the 1940’s, noticed this state of events and was able to envision a change that would transform the housing industry. In Levittown, Levitt’s goal of completing 30 to 40 houses a day was realized through a process similar to the construction of tract homes today. Kenneth T. Jackson, Professor of History at Columbia University, describes the process: “After bulldozing the land and removing the trees, trucks carefully dropped off building material at precise 60-foot intervals.” From there, “the construction process itself was divided into twenty-seven distinct steps—beginning with laying the foundation and ending with a clean sweep of the new home” (234). Each of these 27 steps was completed by a separate crew that was trained for one specific step. They would finish their specific task at one house and then move on to the next house where they would perform that same task. The process mimicked Henry Ford’s implementation of the assembly line in automobile manufacturing. According to Jackson, “this early Levitt house was as basic to post-World War II suburban development as the Model T had been to the automobile” (Jackson, 236). The success of the original town spawned the creation of other “Levittowns” throughout the northeastern United States; the market at this time was ready to accommodate such an aggressive undertaking. In
fact, Levittown has served as a construction model for many of the suburban homes that are built today.

In addition to World War II and its previously mentioned effects—indirect as they may be—on the rising popularity of suburbia, another issue involving the living conditions of the central city arose that gained the attention of many U.S. citizens. Mark Baldassare, a professor in the Social Ecology department at the University of California, Irvine, writes that the "urban crisis" of the mid-1900's had a dramatic influence on the rising number of families leaving the city for the suburb. Concerning the influx of immigrants and the poor into many northern cities, Baldassare notes that employment opportunities were severely limited for many of them, in part due to discriminatory circumstances. "Central cities experienced high crime rates, high unemployment, racial tensions, increasing welfare costs, and rising taxes. These events resulted in large migrations from central cities and, more specifically, the movement of white middle class families to the suburbs" (Baldassare, 480).

The movement of the white middle class was most apparent with regards to mass-produced tract developments, but when suburbia as a whole is considered, the notion that it was solely for the middle class is often misconstrued. John Fine, a professor in the Department of Sociology at California State College at San Bernardino, gathered data showing that, overall, middle class homogeneity in the suburbs never truly existed. On the contrary, Fine states that people of a broad range of occupational stature have been well represented in suburbia (Fine, 95; Sharpe, 7-9).

In an attempt to characterize the post World War II suburbs, Kenneth Jackson offers the following five commonalities: (1) peripheral location; (2) lower densities
than the earlier streetcar suburbs; (3) similarly-styled architecture; (4) higher availability due to mass-production and government financing that offered lower interest rates; and (5) economic and racial homogeneity (238-41). While Jackson’s research on economic homogeneity in the post-World War II suburbs first appears to contradict that of the previously mentioned John Fine’s, he later explains that the economic homogeneity exists within each specific subdivision—largely due to zoning regulations—not necessarily suburbia as a whole (241-42). While some of these basic characteristics are still applicable to many of today’s suburbs, others have evolved in recent years.

Even though it appears that suburbia may have been reasonably diverse with regards to the economic status of its inhabitants, there existed a great need to accommodate a broader range of people with regard to social and racial diversification. Following the war, it was typical for suburban dwellers to commute to and from their places of employment, which were located in the central city. At that time, it was mainly the white population who had the means by which to commute on a daily basis, and consequently, the suburban population was white for the most part (Miller, 394). More recently, however, as suburbs have grown, they have become increasingly independent of the central cities in many ways. Over the past few decades, employment opportunities have risen as suburbia has experienced industrial growth. Today, it is common for much of the suburban population to find employment opportunities either within their own suburban communities or in adjacent ones. And with the continued growth of digital communication networks, where almost any type of information can be accessed from almost anywhere, the
opportunity to work from a remote location—away from central city headquarters, for example—is also becoming more and more common throughout the United States.

Joel Garreau, a senior writer for the *Washington Post*, divides the post-World War II suburbia into three “waves.” The first was the “suburbanization of America” when Americans moved their homes away from the traditional urban cores. The second wave was the “mailing of America,” which began when Americans grew tired of returning to the central city for shopping purposes, and as a result, moved their marketplaces to the suburbs. And finally, the third wave occurred when “our means of creating wealth, the essence of urbanism—our jobs,” were also moved out to the suburbs (Garreau, 4). This final wave is what has ultimately led to the creation of what Garreau calls “Edge Cities”—cities that he argues constitute “the biggest change in a hundred years in how we build the cities that are the cornerstones, capstones, and, sometimes, millstones of our civilization” (Garreau, xii).

It is important to note that Edge Cities are not simply suburbs that include residential, retail, and office space. According to Garreau, they have evolved into something more than just a suburb and must include the following characteristics: (1) have a minimum of 5,000,000 square feet of leasable office space; (2) have a minimum of 600,000 square feet of leasable retail space; (3) have more jobs than bedrooms; (4) be perceived by the public as one place; and (5) be “nothing” like a city thirty years prior (Garreau, 7).

Expanding on Garreau’s notion of the Edge City, but focusing on a smaller, more common portion of suburbia are Robert E. Lang, director of the Metropolitan Institute at Virginia Tech, and Dolores Hayden, professor of architecture and urbanism at Yale
University. Lang coined the term *Edgeless City* in 2002 to characterize a suburb that, once again, has residential, retail, and office space—but has *less* than 5,000,000 square feet of leasable office space (Lang, 4). Hayden, however, believes that the term *edge node* is more appropriate and can be used to cover both Garreau and Lang’s new city terms. She considers the use of the word *city* to be misleading to describe these emerging growth nodes that surround the central city because “these areas usually lack the public space, transit, pedestrian amenities, and overall density of a traditional downtown” (Hayden, *A Field Guide* 39). While Garreau, Lang, and Hayden all offer a slightly different take on the evolution of the suburbs, the important thing to note is that America’s suburbs have undergone much change over the past several decades and continue to change today.

These recent circumstances have led the suburban population to become more economically and socially diverse. It is also now common to find households that are non-family or adults without children. In addition, suburbia now finds itself in a situation where a more racially diverse population is being realized, albeit through a slow and difficult process (Baldassare, 481; Miller, 403). In response to these more recent changes, issues dealing with livability and creative land planning should be thoughtfully dealt with in new ways.

Since 1950, the suburban population in the United States has more than doubled, from approximately 23 percent in 1950 to over 50 percent in 2000 (Baldassare 477, U.S. Census Bureau). As suburban communities in the western United States have grown at such a rapid pace in recent years—coupled with the aforementioned recent physical, social, and racial changes that have accompanied this growth—it has
become apparent that various land development issues have arisen and will,
subsequently, be addressed within this study.

Before resolving any development issues, the home-building industry should first
ask the question: What is wrong with suburban land development? One of the most
prominent answers given by many suburban dwellers is the dissatisfaction with the
quality of life—mainly due to livability issues within their communities (more
detailed information concerning resident concern will be addressed in the ensuing
chapters). There is a lack of creativity in the planning of communities and the
changing lifestyle of many of the new residents is not being taken into consideration.
In order to more fully begin to solve the problems related to suburban growth,
however, another question should be addressed: Why is suburbia planned as it is?
While there are many factors that affect the planning of suburban neighborhoods, this
study is primarily interested in two: the economic drivers of development and the lack
of neighborhood design options currently available to the land developers who create
the communities. Finally, a third question should be asked: What alternative
solutions to neighborhood design in suburban communities can be implemented that
successfully resolve the issues generated by the two previous questions? The
remainder of this study focuses on these three questions as they relate to Las Vegas
and the general U.S. population. It provides more detailed information, case studies,
and data to illustrate the importance of alternative solutions with regards to suburban
growth.
CHAPTER 3

THE NEED FOR COMMUNITY BELONGING: CREATING

A VARIED GROUP OF SUBURBAN

NEIGHBORHOODS TO MEET

THE DIFFERENT NEEDS

OF A GROWING

CITY

"It is safe to conclude that in the latter part of the twentieth century, we have
forgotten how to plan communities…. We must realize that communities need to
grow consciously into a preconceived vision, rather than into an urban form created
by mandated minimums" (Porterfield, 5). Although this statement by Gerald A.
Porterfield, director of community design for the Talbot Group and member of the
Urban Land Institute as well as the American Planning Association, should not be
taken as a direct assault on the entire planning profession, it can act as a useful
critique that can be directed towards many of the community planning methods used
today.

Because this study focuses on neighborhood design and how it affects a
community, it is important to understand what community is and what it is not. The
term community carries many connotations. Some of these connotations do not
necessarily describe community as it should be. For instance, community is not
simply a series or group of components that are merely connected to each other by
roads. From a different standpoint, community should similarly not be viewed as a
group of people or interest group looking to be noticed or insisting that their problems
be addressed. The idea of community involves a deeper understanding. To obtain a
sense of what community means solely as a term, the following excerpt from
Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary is helpful: community is “an interacting
population of various kinds of individuals (as species) in a common location” or “a
group of people with a common characteristic or interest living together within a
larger society.” To now conceptualize the term community, it can be perceived as “a
sense of belonging, a way of life, and diversity with a common purpose” (Porterfield,
8).

Many modern communities do not display the previously mentioned fundamental
attributes to the extent that they provide healthy neighborhoods. Not only have the
automobile, Internet, and other modern technological advances impaired the physical
makeup of our communities by suggesting that the need for them to be physically
compact is now unnecessary, the planning process has been more to react to the rapid
pace of development rather than to manage and nurture it. Porterfield makes an
excellent point that society has “substituted subdivision layout for community design
and shopping center trips for social interaction.” He then goes on to write that
“communities need to be of a finer texture, allowing more opportunity for interaction
among our diverse peoples and thus enhancing our understanding of one another by
identifying and focusing on the commonalities among us. Community, therefore, is 
*belonging; community is a common purpose*” (Porterfield, 9).

The question was previously asked: What is wrong with suburban land 
development? The answer given—dissatisfaction with the quality of life, or livability 
issues, in part due to the lack of creativity with regards to planning—deals directly 
with the concept of community. Planning and neighborhood design methods have 
remained static and have not sufficiently adapted to current—and ever-changing—
resident needs. Although these are not the only areas in which suburbia has issues, 
they provide a good platform upon which designers can contribute new ideas.

Baldassare affirms that while not all of the suburban population is displeased with 
their communities, it has become increasingly common to find many who are. In the 
United States, the majority of suburban dwellers still prefer the small, residential 
suburb. The problem is that modern-day suburbs are typically large and often exist in 
crowded regions (Baldassare, 479). The rapid growth of the suburban population has 
caused this transition and is one of the reasons that many studies focus on the 
dissatisfaction with the quality of life inside of communities—especially at the 
neighborhood level.

Although national surveys support the claims among suburbanites of 
dissatisfaction with their communities, these surveys also provide evidence that 
suburban residents have a more positive overall rating of their communities than do 
central city dwellers. Suburbanites are also more prone to know their neighbors and 
have neighborhood friends (Brown, 416). Such information provides hope that even 
with the perceived problems regarding the quality of life in suburban neighborhoods,
there does exist a community bond—even more so than in the central city—and the opportunity to build upon this positive bond provides designers and developers a chance to improve the lives of those living within their designed communities. Additionally, studies have found that satisfaction declines within communities as their overall population increases (Baldassare, 486-87). To maintain a higher level of satisfaction, it becomes important that communities be designed in such a way that growth is handled in a more meaningful manner.

George B. Tobey, professor of Landscape Architecture at Ohio State University, suggests that planners and designers alike must create goals that address the habits, values, and intentions of a neighborhood's residents if community is to be successfully realized. Too often, the designer's own values dictate the planning process instead of the values of the actual users. Physically, communities should adequately supply the resources by which people, goods, and information can be moved. They should also permit the residents freedom in their choice and ability to interact with other residents, while at the same time providing for their health, comfort, and safety. Tobey also suggests that successful communities should be resilient to future modifications or trends—while retaining their image as a unified whole (Tobey, 208). In addition to these goals, each community might also include other goals that are adapted to fit the specific needs of that community.

Another problem that has plagued suburbia in the United States is that the methods by which suburban homes are set up—mainly site planning methods—stem primarily from the 1950's notion that such communities were primarily for the white middle class. Robert Fishman, in Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia,
asks, "How can a form [(suburbia)] based on the principle of exclusion include everyone?" (52). Echoing Fishman’s concern, Paul Lusk, a professor of architecture and planning at the University of New Mexico, asserts that the “continuing lack of housing options, the near uniformity of codes, and the replication of patterns still engender resistance to the integration of complexity and change” (457). This resistance to change stems from the one-dimensional regulatory codes (or, perhaps, vice versa in some instances) that have been prevalent over the past few decades and, consequently, have made it difficult to incorporate some of modern society’s living needs into today’s communities. There are signs, however, that indicate an increasing amount of the current suburban population is open to some change, which will be addressed later in this study.

Because such outdated and restrictive procedures have made it difficult to integrate the changing needs of today’s suburban population into existing communities, developers have simply pushed new housing to the peripheries where the outdated regulatory codes (dealing mainly with density and housing type) can be more readily met (Lusk, 457). So not only do new projects typically occur on new tracts of land, they are also relying on the repeated and static methods of the past—lacking any significant amount of creativity or diversity. To help accommodate the new ways of modern living through planning and design, Lusk provides a six-step process that assists in the adaptation to future issues within existing communities. These steps are not intended to supersede the existing planning structure, but to help incorporate new development into the existing structure:

1. Becoming familiar with existing bylaws/zoning.
2. Understanding community needs.
3. Conceiving a vision.
4. Proposing a concept.
5. Simulating a site plan.
6. Creating a design code. (Lusk, 457)

As Lusk’s six-step process suggests, it is desirable to first gain an understanding of the area—in context of its surroundings as well as any existing regulatory conditions—before beginning the conceptual work. It is also important to note that these six steps should not be addressed individually but, instead, should overlap each other as they are implemented into the planning process.

Further strengthening the need to implement variations in suburban neighborhood design is the work of demographer Will Frey, who found that in the year 2000, “traditional” households—those consisting of married couples and children—made up just 27 percent of all suburban households; married couples without children made up 29 percent; “non-family” households (friends, roommates, etc.) made up another 29 percent; and “other” family units (single parents, grandparents, or any other combination of family members not already listed) made up the final 15 percent. Frey calculates that by the year 2010, traditional families will make up a mere 20 percent of suburban households (Schmitz, 3). It is often the case that creative neighborhood design solutions that seek to better fulfill the particular needs of suburban residents are absent in many housing projects and, with the household data provided by Schmitz, it is evident that such creativity within the housing market is as important as ever.
Not only have many of today’s suburban development projects not met the needs of the more diverse U.S. household makeup, which was previously described, these projects typically do not address the increasing need for more affordable housing for lower-income families. A recent investigation conducted by the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) showed that for four continuous years there was no location in the U.S. where “a minimum wage job provide[d] enough income for a household to afford the Fair Market Rental for a two bedroom home,” that “the gap between wages and rents has continued to broaden and deepen.” During these same four years, rent has exceeded inflation, and mortgage costs rose “much faster than income (Hudnut, 245-51).

The problem largely affects two groups—low-income families and the low to moderate-income “workforce” families. While federal funding exists for low-income families, it has been drastically cut over the past 25 years—from over 80 billion dollars (already adjusted to the current dollar equivalent) in 1978 to just over 29 billion dollars in 2004. The problem is perhaps even worse for the workforce families. According to William H. Hudnut III, holder of the ULI/Joseph C. Canizaro Chair for Public Policy, workforce families are those that consist of “blue-collar workers, municipal employees, teachers, entry-level police and firefighters, janitors, clerks, service workers, waiters and waitresses, and nurses, for example, who earn too much to qualify for federal housing assistance, but not enough to purchase or rent homes at the market rate in their communities.” He notes that these workforce families typically generate anywhere from 60 to 120 percent of median area incomes (Hudnut, 246). Policies providing help need to find a way to include these low to
moderate-income family households, and while this is a growing problem throughout the entire United States, it has recently become even more of an issue particularly in the Las Vegas Valley where housing costs have skyrocketed over the past couple of years.

While much of the information previously provided supports the need for diversified design for suburban neighborhood, this is not to say that efforts to accomplish this task do not already exist. On the contrary, recent movements—namely New Urbanism and Smart Growth—have made important contributions throughout the United States over the past decade, but have yet to make much of an impact on the Las Vegas Valley and many of the other major metropolitan areas in the Southwestern states.

New Urbanism and Smart Growth are often confused one with another because they share many of the same principles and because their emergence as popular movements occurred near the same time—from the late 1980’s to the early 1990’s for New Urbanism and in the mid-1990’s for Smart Growth. For clarification, this study turned to the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU) and Smart Growth America—two of the most influential organizations dedicated to the promotion of their respective movements.

The Congress for the New Urbanism provides the following description of a New Urbanist:

New Urbanists aim to reform all aspects of real estate development. Their work affects regional and local plans. They are involved in new development, urban retrofits, and suburban infill. In all cases, New Urbanist neighborhoods
are walkable, and contain a diverse range of housing and jobs. New Urbanists support regional planning for open space, appropriate architecture and planning, and a balanced development of jobs and housing. They believe these strategies are the best way to reduce how long people spend in traffic, to increase the supply of affordable housing, and to rein in urban sprawl. (CNU, website)

New Urbanist goals apply in all levels of planning and design—from region to neighborhood to building—in an effort to reclaim “our homes, blocks, streets, parks, neighborhoods, districts, towns, cities, regions, and environment” (CNU, website).

As for Smart Growth, “we define [it] according to its outcomes—outcomes that mirror the basic values of most Americans,” writes Smart Growth America. These “outcomes” are: (1) neighborhood livability; (2) better access, less traffic; (3) thriving cities, suburbs, and towns; (4) shared benefits; (5) lower costs, lower taxes; and (6) keeping open space open. In order to realize these “outcomes,” Smart Growth America lists ten fundamental strategies that their communities should strive to achieve:

1. Mix land uses.
2. Take advantage of existing community assets.
3. Create a range of housing opportunities and choices.
5. Promote distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place, including the rehabilitation and use of historic buildings.
6. Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental area.

7. Strengthen and encourage growth in existing communities.

8. Provide a variety of transportation choices.

9. Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost-effective.

10. Encourage citizen and stakeholder participation in developmental decisions. *Smart Growth America, website*

A common misconception with regard to Smart Growth is that its main objective is to slow down growth. Such an objective is not feasible as the U.S. population is projected to increase by more than 48 percent over the next 50 years (U.S. Census Bureau). As David O’Neill of the Urban Land Institute notes, it is important to understand that “Smart Growth does not seek to stop or limit growth, but rather to accommodate it in a way that enhances the economy, protects the environment, and preserves or improves a community’s quality of life” (O’Neill, 5).

In an effort to further distinguish the origins of Smart Growth from those of New Urbanism, Joel S. Hirschhorn, the former Director of Environment, Energy, and Natural Resources at the National Governors Association, provides the following distinctions: “environmental roots for Smart Growth versus architectural roots for New Urbanism; a public policy focus for Smart Growth versus a design orientation for New Urbanism; [and lastly,] people with environmental, planning, social equity, or public policy backgrounds in Smart Growth versus architects, designers, and academics in New Urbanism” (Hirschhorn, website). Although these initial differences help one to understand the origins of each movement, it should be noted...
that time has since narrowed the gap such that today there is an overlap in the focus and the involved parties that Hirschhorn described. In fact, the two movements have enough similarities that, in an attempt to further strengthen their contribution to society, it would be beneficial for both to form some sort of a coalition in which they could combine their related efforts.

While there does not exist a step-by-step, guaranteed solution to the design problems facing many of today's neighborhoods, New Urbanist and Smart Growth guidelines offer platforms from which progress can be made. Any project that a developer initiates is sure to have its own unique set of issues and, consequently, could require a unique set of solutions that go beyond the guidelines of New Urbanism and Smart Growth. This sort of adaptation process has already occurred within these new movements. Even though their values and vision have remained constant, both organizations have had to adapt in some aspects in order to work with the ever-changing needs and issues of today's society. For example, in the early stages of the New Urbanist movement, it was heavily criticized for being more concerned with nostalgic aesthetics over practicality. In recent years, however, the idea that the architecture of a New Urbanist community should bring back a certain nostalgic look has become less important, while the practical applications relating to the connection between the residents and their neighborhood through the use of buildings, streets, parks, and other amenities have become the focal points. This is not to say that aesthetics are now overlooked, but that they need not confine themselves to the extent that they were in earlier New Urbanist projects.
In addition to the help that New Urbanism and Smart Growth can offer a developer in the creation of alternative neighborhoods is the help that government agencies, planners, architects, landscape architects, and the public in general can provide. Not only are planners and architects important to the development process for aesthetic reasons, physical safety, and market risk, they can be instrumental in securing planning and zoning approvals. It is often the case that architects have a more favorable public image than do developers—whether justified or not—and such an image assists in securing project support. So whether the implementation of new design methods is accomplished through incentives from the city or by economically feasible alternative solutions without government help, then communities could offer a wider variety of choices to potential residents. While there are sure to be various ways of accomplishing this, there are two that this study will investigate—each of which could be utilized in the Las Vegas Valley.

While the focus of this study is not apartment living, there are valuable lessons that the home-building industry can learn from apartments and their general organization. Before projecting any of the positive elements of the apartment into the home-building process, it is first necessary to identify which type of apartment living is being described. Apartments have taken on various forms in the United States over the past 150 years. They were originally found in downtown New York where they housed only the wealthy. Later, as apartments became more accepted, they moved from being highly ornate and lavish to small, simple edifices marketed to those with single-family housing tastes. In the 1950’s, after the war, apartment living outside the major cities gradually became synonymous with low-income housing and the poor—
due in large part to the success of the tract home (Ford, 393–407). In more recent decades, apartments have become common in the suburban landscape where they often take on the form of medium-sized multiunit complexes that are laid out in clusters. It is because of this cluster-like arrangement that this latter type of apartment is of use to this study.

Although the use of open space will be more directly addressed in the following chapter, it is necessary to relate it briefly to the ideas expressed in this chapter—specifically, clustered housing. The inclusion, or preservation, of open space has been an important topic over the last few decades. With the expansion of growth toward the peripheries of most metropolitan U.S. cities, the amount of peripheral open space continues to diminish. The majority of suburban neighborhoods are arranged in such a manner that the only “open space” they provide is in their front and back yards. In many Las Vegas residential communities, this space is too small to be used for any “big-muscle” activities. Much of the space is actually poorly utilized (wasted space) for what actually occurs within its walls (i.e., for barbequing, to relax and get some fresh air, etc.). But instead of eliminating the private space altogether, as many residents still desire some exterior private space, techniques could be used that would minimize such space to more accurately fit the actual use it provides for the resident (as it currently does, even with the slightly bigger yard). The “newly acquired” space from each unit could then be more efficiently networked between a number of residents—providing a better use of a neighborhood’s exterior space while at the same time providing important public space. In doing this, it would also be desirable that the private space be set up to appear less intrusive to the public space, perhaps by
reducing the visual impact of its physical boundaries through the use of shorter walls and strategically placed vegetation.

The small yard of many residential homes is mainly due to the close proximity in which single-family detached homes are placed. Close proximity, however, is not the issue—in fact, it helps to create a higher density within suburbia. Higher densities formed by cluster-grouping homes provides another opportunity to preserve more open space between such clusters, but land developers in Las Vegas have done little to promote this. It is here that apartment complex layouts can be helpful. By creating a neighborhood in which single-family homes are clustered together in groups—possibly through a modified zero-lot-line solution that would allow the homes to be attached—it could then become possible to preserve open space between the different clusters of attached homes. Not only does this preserve open space, it provides a greater opportunity for resident interaction through such public space.

In the ULI article entitled “Running out of Land,” Frank Beck notes that physical restraints in the unoccupied Las Vegas landscape—mainly challenging soils and excessively sloped sites—are restricting the availability of remaining undeveloped land (Beck, 74). Perhaps the clustered housing approach previously described could be best implemented on a sloped site where views could be made available even though the units are attached. While such an approach would not fit the needs or desires of everyone, the goal is to provide valuable and creative options in suburban communities for a diverse population with a variety of needs.

The idea of implementing various forms of clustered housing is by no means unique to this study. Urban planners and organizations such as the ULI have
endorsed such housing techniques for decades, but the number of actual projects that have used these techniques is relatively few. One of the main reasons for this has been the suburban population's generally negative perception of higher density housing within their suburbs. It is perhaps with situations like these that a movement such as that of Smart Growth, which encourages higher density and clustered housing, can help to change this negative perception. In some instances, which will be covered within subsequent pages of this study, a change in perception has already begun.

Sandy D'Elia, author of the ULI article “Reshaping the Urban Form” and specialist in urban redevelopment, presents two critical factors necessary to begin to reshape the urban form. The first involves developing a sense of community—or belonging—at the neighborhood level, which was previously described. The second critical factor involves finding opportunities to improve underused land within the existing suburban environment—often referred to as “greyfield sites.” To assist in accomplishing such goals, D'Elia finds it important that partnerships be formed amongst the involved parties—i.e., reshaping the urban form is a responsibility that should not be left solely to the land developer.

There are currently efforts being made in California that directly deal with D'Elia’s second critical factor. In Christine Rombouts’ article “Redoing the Strip,” she describes how existing run-down retail strip centers are being converted into mixed-use neighborhoods termed suburban villages—an idea strongly supported by the American Planning Association. These villages include homes, apartments, shops, restaurants, offices, and entertainment and have gained support from both the housing industry and the local government because of the need for housing space in
much of California (D’Elia, 47). Such reuse projects not only provide new housing for those with a little more disposable income, they can also help to alleviate the growing need for affordable housing in suburban neighborhoods. And while it has long been the case that affordable or subsidized housing within suburban neighborhoods has brought about a sense of apprehension among suburban residents, it appears as though the modern day’s increasingly diverse suburban population is becoming more open-minded with regards to mixed-income, higher density housing techniques that have long been missing in suburban neighborhoods. This trend will be documented later in the study.

One of the reasons reuse projects can be so successful to a varied group of income levels is that the infrastructure systems already exist. Public transportation is more readily available for the lower-income families that cannot afford a vehicle as well as those who simply believe it is a good idea. With increasing land and infrastructure construction costs adding to new housing costs, along with the decreasing availability of land, this type of land-use could be extremely beneficial to our cities. Randy Jackson, principal of the Planning Center in Costa Mesa, California, acknowledges the need for creativity and diversity with regard to suburban growth. “We need to dedicate ourselves to reinventing our suburban communities by committing to more efficient and creative use of land.” Jackson’s director of government services, Melani Smith, adds that “when successfully redeveloped, older strip shopping centers present an opportunity for communities to reinforce [neighborhood] identity. We need a broader and more diverse selection of housing options beyond the single-family, detached home in suburbia” (D’Elia, 47).
Many greyfield sites provide great opportunities for higher density projects because they exist in areas where services are within walking distance and where taking public transportation is a possibility. Not only can these types of projects be successful in and of themselves, they can help revive the surrounding area by providing many new permanent residents. Oliver Gillham, an architect and planner in Cambridge, Massachusetts, notes that even with the negative connotation of density held by past suburban residents, “some of the new traditional communities appear to be successful in overcoming some of these biases by selling themselves as a new model of development, one that emphasizes community over individual home lots,” and that this “new emphasis on community is one of the most positive aspects of this new trend” (Gillham, 197-98).

In addition to the greyfield sites that can be found throughout many existing suburban neighborhoods are the parcels of land left vacant within these same areas. This occurrence is widely evident in the Las Vegas Valley where, partially due to the rapid pace of growth, developers have often overlooked these vacant properties and have, instead, consumed peripheral lands. While the reality of land development on the periphery will in all likelihood continue to exist, one hopes that such development will not only apply new design methods that better utilize the peripheral lands, but that developers will also search for opportunities to create projects in locations where infrastructure already exists. It is often the case that existing neighborhoods—even many that are still relatively new—never achieve their full potential in terms of neighborhood unity. Instead, they often suffer because of the rapid cycle of “newer and better” developments that are built up around them. It appears, however, that a
new group of potential home-buyers are beginning to searching for homes located in areas of patchwork development over that of the periphery.

A recent survey done by the Public Policy Institute of California reinforces the idea that infill development within existing suburban neighborhoods is not only important to city health, but attainable in today’s market. Approximately half of those that responded to the survey said they would prefer a mixed-use community within walking distance of shops, restaurants, and other entertainment activities. John Martin, principal of a California-based strategic marketing firm, recognizes this need, stating that “due to changing demographics and current migration patterns and family structures, there is a large market for the higher-density housing of suburban villages.” As an example of this demographic change, Martin mentions that, for over four decades, builders have built homes for families with children, but that current data indicates a growing market for homes in suburban areas for residents without children, and that this trend is likely to grow over the next decade. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 87 percent of the new household growth in the United States from the year 2000-2010 is projected to be married couples without children and single-person households. “Society is changing,” says Martin. “It’s more diverse, and we need to change by producing more diverse and varied housing in more interesting and appealing neighborhoods” (D’Elia, 47).

To help during this time of transition, now that many suburban residents are looking for alternative neighborhood design options, local agencies can, and should, play a significant role in the implementation of new design methods. Many of the
conditions relevant to planning and design are specific to location and, consequently, require specific solutions or policies.

The city of Portland, Oregon, provides a good example of how a local agency has contributed to the realization of improved neighborhood design. Eran Ben-Joseph, a professor of landscape architecture and planning at MIT, notes that in urban development, over one-third of the space is dedicated to motor vehicle infrastructure. Partly because of circumstances such as these, it was in 1991 that Portland city officials approved the use of new street standards in their transportation plan. They called it the “Skinny Street Program” because it reduced the minimum required width of residential streets in an effort to improve neighborhood integrity. Additional benefits were decreased water runoff, less slope impact, and decreased cost, which caught the attention of other land developers. This new program gained support from both residents and officials throughout the state and, as a result, the state’s Land Conservation and Development Commission has influenced other state jurisdictions to implement the program. Ultimately, the success of this seemingly small idea was such that 30 other jurisdictions from 16 states have adopted the Skinny Street Program in some form or another (Szold, 112-14). With the high cost of land within the Las Vegas Valley, standards and regulations similar to the Skinny Street Program could help eliminate some of the infrastructure costs to developers, while at the same time providing a more efficient use of land—one that could also promote more resident interaction.

While the implementation of the several previously proposed project types is currently in progress throughout the United States, the number of projects and the rate
by which it is being done could be improved, especially here in the Las Vegas Valley. These types of projects are possible, but their success is often realized through partnerships involving the city, designers, residents, and developers if they are to be successful.
The language of landscape is our native language. Landscape was the original dwelling; humans evolved among plants and animals, under the sky, upon the earth, near water. Everyone carries that legacy in body and mind. Humans touched, saw, heard, smelled, tasted, lived in, and shaped landscapes before the species had words to describe what it did (Spinn, 15).

Ann Whiston Spirn, professor of landscape architecture and planning at MIT, suggests that the term landscape is no longer completely understood here in the United States. By using the Danish (landskab), German (landschaft), and Dutch (landschap) origins of the word landscape, Spirn is able to provide a better understanding of its meaning. First, “land” signifies the place as well as the people living there. The terms Skabe, schaffen, and schappen mean “to shape,” while the suffixes skab, schaft, and schap also connote association or partnership. These original meanings have seemingly been lost from the English term. For example, Spirn notes that in Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary, the term landscape is defined as static in nature: “a picture representing a section of natural,
inland scenery, as of prairie, woodland, mountains... an expanse of natural scenery seen by the eye in one view.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* derives the word *landscape* from the Dutch painting term *landskip*, but as Spirn relates, landscape is “not a mere visual surface, static composition, or passive backdrop to human theater.” Such definitions are inadequate in that they omit people. Although these might be seen by some as mere definitions taken from a dictionary, they represent the modern day interpretation of the word and should be revised to incorporate original meanings—as such definitions are representative of modern society’s viewpoint. Society must understand that landscape connects people and place. “Landscape connotes a sense of the purposefully shaped, the sensual and aesthetic, the embeddedness in culture. The language of landscape recovers the dynamic connection between place and those who dwell there” (Spirn, 16-17).

Could the modern-day interpretation of landscape be connected to a lack of correlation between the landscape and many suburban developments—especially here in the Southwest? After all, part of what makes the suburb an ideal place of residence for many people is the supposed inclusion of green open space. The problem is that this ideal of “living with green open spaces”—or within the desert landscape as would be the case here in Las Vegas—is not often realized in many of today’s suburban neighborhoods.

“Open space is the hard infrastructure that is needed to launch soft infrastructure” (Schmitz, 62). For a suburban development to be more thoroughly successful, it is crucial that the open spaces that are formed provide a complete environment in which the needs of the residents are met—both physically as well as emotionally. Adrienne
Schmitz of the Urban Land Institute provides designers and developers alike with the following list of basic community needs that can be attained through the use of open space design: (1) belonging; (2) relaxation; (3) solitude; (4) big-muscle activities; (5) quiet games; (6) nature study; (7) hand-intellect activities; (8) adventure and creative play; (9) rhythm and music; (10) drama; (11) social activities; (12) community service; and (13) mental exercise (Schmitz, 62-64). While thoughtfully produced open space can provide for such community needs, an ill-designed, less thoughtful open space system can often result in wasted or unutilized space.

Cynthia L. Girling, professor in the Department of Landscape Architecture at the University of Oregon, Eugene, acknowledges that “open space” is a relatively ambiguous concept. Girling states that “it encompasses ideas of the out-of-doors, public access and activity, and the relationship between nature and community,” but she does not end her definition there. She realizes that any modern definition of open space should contain more depth—that it should “include all aspects of the public and private landscape, including streets, sidewalks, yards, and driveways, as well as vacant and natural lands” (17). So not only do many suburban neighborhoods lack sufficient “green” open space, they also fail to acknowledge the value of placing importance on the other types of open space—namely streets, sidewalks, and other less “natural” examples. Elizabeth Moule, an urbanist practitioner and one of the founding members of the Congress for New Urbanism, further emphasized the importance of the street when she said that while two buildings situated next to each other constitute an architectural project, two building situated across the street from each other comprise an urban project (Dutton, 97). Moule’s observation offers a good
example of how suburban development can utilize certain urban characteristics to link their communities together to create a sociologically healthier, more interactive environment.

Inadequate open space can be partially attributed to the common emphasis given to the private yard of the single-family detached home, which is often realized at the expense of the more public landscapes of the street and park. This is not to say that suburban homeowners should not have access to a private outdoor space, as such space can provide for great opportunities within the family unit—whatever that family unit may be. But in order to promote a healthy and well-rounded neighborhood, attention must be given to both the public and private landscapes. As mentioned in the previous chapter, by creating neighborhoods with higher, clustered densities, the developer could then dedicate more land to open space.

In many instances where developers have included some form of open space within their projects, it is simply to meet the minimum requirements set forth by local authorities. Because of this, the open space is often configured from surplus land instead of being thoughtfully integrated within the neighborhood and surrounding environment. Aldo Leopold, considered by many to be the father of wildlife ecology, once said that “we abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with respect” (Fodor, 26). While Leopold’s statement is over fifty years old, it appears to have become more important with each passing year. His desire to include the land as an actual member of the community was incredibly insightful and should not be dismissed in the home-building process today. Before any land within a project has
been divided into lots or streets, developers and their teams should lay out open space in accordance with existing land conditions. "They should guide the development pattern to ensure minimal grading and visual intrusion while allowing for a pedestrian network" (Szold, 121).

As a supplement to merely providing open space within a neighborhood, the practice of networking the open spaces, one with another, can promote higher water quality, as well as provide possible habitats for plants and animals. Networked open space need not only exist within a single neighborhood; it can be more successful when extended throughout multiple developments. The implementation of such an idea would likely require the support of a city’s planning department, as well as correlation among developers. In addition to any planning modifications, incentives provided by the government could also help to encourage the incorporation of networked open space systems throughout suburban neighborhoods. Such systems could offer residents more opportunities to freely interact with nature and with other users—interaction on a variety of levels now becomes more accessible. Girling provides the following observation:

Urban and suburban landscapes are not independent of nature. Rather, they are part of their region’s ecology. It is possible for them to maintain an ecological balance, but current patterns of development sap resources and damage ecosystems. The design of the suburban landscape is not just a scenic amenity; it contributes to the quality of life, it can provide the structure and frame for a richer existence. It can offer access to diverse opportunities and ease the accomplishments of daily tasks. A well-designed open space system
can decrease automobile use, enable people to walk more and drive less, preserve natural land, and provide connections from developed to undeveloped land. It can contribute to social interaction and community sensibility, as space is actively used and shared. It is a necessary ingredient in the fulfillment of the suburban promise (Girling, 3).

Dealing with the landscape on a suburban scale can have a deep impact on our mental and physical health, in addition to the positive impact it can have on preservation efforts. The key design component involves weaving together the landscape and the lives of those who will use it—the landscape must be readily available and accessible.

Because it is not always feasible—programmatically as well as aesthetically—to preserve the natural environment in its original form, there exists a great need for the landscape architect in open space design. James Corner, chairman and associate professor of the Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning at the University of Pennsylvania, offers some insight into the natural landscape as well as the importance of landscape design. Corner concedes that the term landscape is often ambiguous at best, but that it is first a schema or representation of how one views the external world. Because of this, such a schema or representation is open to interpretation based on individual or cultural viewpoints (Swaffield, 144).

Corner writes that it is also necessary to understand the landscape from the landscape architect’s point of view. The landscape is not only an experience to be analyzed, it now becomes something that is made or designed. Unlike other landscape representations—such as painting or photography, for example—landscape architecture is unique in that it functions within the medium of the landscape itself. It
is a medium “that is irreducibly rich in sensual and phenomenological terms. As a medium of symbolic representation, the landscape and its constitutive elements—stones, plants, water, earth, and sky—when artfully composed—have provided humans with some of the most sacred and powerful places of embodied meaning” (Swaffield, 146).

According to Corner, there exist three phenomena unique to the medium of landscape that provide landscape architecture with an influence not found in other forms of landscape representation, and as such, should not be ignored in neighborhood design. The first is the spatiality of landscape. It is all-encompassing, “flooded with light and atmosphere . . . . Irreducible, it controls our experience extensively; it permeates our memories and consciousness, and enframes our daily lives.” The second phenomenon unique to the medium of landscape architecture is the temporality of the landscape. It is a living thing and changes with time, and as such, relates openly to the human race. The third phenomenon is that of landscape materiality. The landscape is a tangible medium, made up of basic matter, which makes it detectable to our senses (Swaffield, 146-48). These three characteristics enable the landscape to have a significant impact on the health of the human body and mind—making thoughtful and well-executed integration of landscape into the neighborhood a desirable practice in neighborhood design.

In  *Theory in Landscape Architecture: A Reader*, Simon Swaffield arranges a series of essays by prominent members of the landscape architecture profession. Swaffield notes that the essays provide such a diverse range of theory and practice within landscape architecture that it prompts him to question whether or not there
exists much commonality anymore in the experience of “being” a landscape architect. Despite this question, Swaffield suggests that the essays do provide a common intention in overall purpose: “While there are debates over theoretical presumptions and over detailed methods and tactics, there is an overall pattern to the issues being addressed and the responses to those issues.” He then lists the following commonalities in landscape design:

1. Design process in landscape architecture is situated, phased, and reflexive [in that the design process continues to consist of the following phases]:
   - Observation and collation of both site-specific and contextual knowledge.
   - Analytical and interpretive thinking.
   - Creative exploration of possibilities for the future.
   - Deliberation and determination of action.

2. Meaning and significance in landscape architecture are determined within fields of potential relationships, which include, but are not limited to, concepts of nature and culture.

3. The way landscape is represented in plan, image, and text transforms its meaning.

4. A central concern of the discipline is how to configure the modified and constructed ecologies of human settlement and production.

5. Landscape integrity requires active and critical mediation between site, place, and region.
6. Landscape architectural theory may be instrumental, interpretive, and/or critical to differing degrees in different situations. (Swaffield, 227-29)

From project to project, landscape issues and their ensuing responses are dependant upon a unique set of circumstances that may cause designers to add to the previous six commonalities, but by addressing those initial six, designers could more readily create landscapes that fulfill the needs of community residents, as well as provide a setting for which nature can exist.

"There are many people who look to nature for meaning and order, peace and tranquility, introspection and stimulus. Many more look to nature and activity in the outdoors as the road to restoration and health" (McHarg, 5). The need to connect modern-day suburbia with the exterior environment becomes increasingly important as a growing number of people look to suburban neighborhoods as a place of residence. Providing a space in which community residents can function according to their needs is an obligation that designers should incorporate in their practices. Such space must ultimately be arranged in order that the users can call it their own—it must carry with it a high degree of significance. "Like a patina, significance is acquired only with time. And like a patina, it emerges only if the conditions are right" (Treib, 62).
CHAPTER 5

ECONOMIC FEASIBILITY: HOW ALTERNATIVE HOUSING SOLUTIONS CAN BECOME A REALITY

Although the information and methods previously described in this study may lead to a more desirable suburban setting, they could not be realized if deemed unprofitable by the land developer. There must be motivation for the land developer if such alternative methods are to be implemented; they must be economically feasible, perhaps to the extent that they are as profitable as, if not more profitable than, the current methods. This chapter will examine the economic drivers behind suburban land development and the methods used to calculate the potential risks and rewards of any given project.

Too often, developers have a poor reputation among the general public and even the design professions. While the poor reputation is deserved in some instances, it is important to keep in mind that many good developers do exist. For many people, in order to appreciate a developer’s work, it is necessary to understand from where they are coming. They must be proactive. Their line of work requires taking great financial risks and, consequently, some developers are inclined to produce generic work that is time-tested. But it is not only this type of generic work that causes the
poor reputation. Developers also receive scrutiny because of new and creative ideas—mainly because they bring about change, which residents often find hard to accept—no matter how beneficial the change actually may be. The reality is that "communities will always grow and change, with or without developers. With a good developer, however, growth and renewal can be managed and made to have a positive effect on a community" (Miles, 10). The purpose of this chapter is to provide a guide by which the design and home-building industry can successfully realize any new and innovative ideas with the support of the communities involved.

"‘If you build it they will come.’ Many real estate projects have relied on this familiar Hollywood axiom. But in the real world of bricks and mortar, the economic success of any real estate development hinges on its market potential. Developers must fully understand who their tenants or buyers are and how to satisfy them with the right product at the right location at the right price” (Schmitz, vi). Typically, if a developer is to be profitable with any project they must first complete a market analysis; this need greatly increases if the project incorporates new, uncommon, or previously untested ideas. According to Adrienne Schmitz, the market study should address three fundamental questions. First, do potential renters or buyers for the proposed project exist? Second, will the project be quickly absorbed into the market, and if so, at what price? And third, what measures can be taken to make the project more competitive with regards to other similar projects in the area? Such an analysis ultimately relates to the study of supply and demand—frequently giving the more creative solutions an advantage. With regard to the study of supply and demand, it is
often the case that the demand analysis is more complex than the supply analysis.

Demand analysis considers the following information:

- Population, households, and demographic characteristics.
- Income, affordability, and purchasing power.
- Employment, by industry or occupation.
- Migration and commuting patterns.
- Other factors, depending on the type of real estate development being studied.

Supply analysis, which includes analysis of competing projects, considers a different set of factors:

- Inventory of existing space or units.
- Vacancy rates and characteristics of vacant stock.
- Recent absorption of space, including types of tenants or buyers.
- Projects under construction and proposed.
- Market rents or sale prices and how they differ across locations and by quality of product.
- Features, functions, and advantages of existing and proposed projects.
- Lease or sale terms and concessions (free rent, bonus features, tenant improvement allowances, etc.). (Schmitz, 3-5)

From regional influences such as building methods and trends to the more local influences of suppliers and rival developers, the information gathered from the market analysis is critical to the developer in nearly every aspect of decision-making with regard to a proposed project. As important as the market analysis is, however, such
an analysis is typically only a portion of the data that is included within an overall “feasibility study.”

Once the market study is completed, it is possible for the developer to further explore a proposed project by focusing on the specifics listed below. What were originally mere assumptions can now be demonstrated through the feasibility study. Such a study can ultimately lead the developing team to conclude whether or not a specific project is viable. James A. Graaskamp, a renowned real estate educator, defined real estate feasibility by stating that a “project is ‘feasible’ when the real estate analyst determines that there is a reasonable likelihood of satisfying explicit objectives when a selected course of action is tested for fit to a context of specific constraints and limited resources” (Graaskamp, 515). Just as the market analysis had a list of factors, so too does the feasibility study. The following list, taken from Real Estate Development: Principles and Process, provides the key components that any successful feasibility study should include:

- The target market for the project, from the big picture down to an absorption schedule for today in the particular target niche—progressing from world to nation to region to city to neighborhood to site.
- A careful enumeration of the target market—number of people, their tastes, and their income—tied to the specific area.
- Identification of appropriate comparable properties (the competition) along with the major features, functions, and benefits of each.
- The economic performance of comparables.
- The foregoing information tied into a discounted cash flow model.
• A sensitivity analysis to move from feasible to optimal [with regards to profitability], with an individual evaluation of each component of the plan.

• A review of risks in the realistic configuration, with appropriate risk-control techniques.

• Confirmation that the project is feasible for each participant. (Miles, 340)

When the feasibility study is completed, it should typically include the following documents: (1) an executive summary; (2) maps; (3) photographs of the site; (4) renderings; (5) an electronic valuation model derived from the site; (6) documented cost projections; (7) a time line; and (8) résumés [or summaries] (Miles, 340). As previously noted, the need for a sound feasibility study increases when the developer pursues new, untested, or innovative ideas. Sadly, many new projects that have the potential to contribute to a positive sense of community never make it past the feasibility study. Instead, they are deemed to be impractical—not due to livability issues, but to economic constraints.

While there are various economic constraints that inhibit the realization of many new and innovative projects—such as the rising cost of construction/materials and the potentially higher fees charged by planners and architects for the conception of new development methods—perhaps the most significant economic constraint, specifically within the Las Vegas Valley, has been the increasingly high cost of land that is added to the already risky endeavor of creating a new project type (i.e., it’s an expensive market to take risks—but with greater risk comes the potential for greater reward). The average cost for one acre of undeveloped land in the Las Vegas area has grown to over $600,000. This increase in land costs can be directly attributed to the rapid
growth in recent years that has taken up much of the available land and has influenced the type of projects that have been realized. In cases such as this, where economic constraints hinder the development of potentially revolutionary neighborhood design methods, the government can play an active role in alleviating some of the economic burdens that the developer might encounter.

Governmental policies and agenda have strongly aided the growth of suburbia in the United States. From the construction of the interstate highway system to the mortgage deductions and income tax incentives, government involvement has been generous and, consequently, has significantly influenced the direction taken by land developers. As Duany and Plater-Zyberk so directly state, "as long as zoning codes favor low-density development over the creation of compact communities, developers will not be able to shake their reputation as land rapists, as they turn farm after farm into cookie-cutter sprawl. This is why one can buy a bumper sticker that reads: 'Leaving town? Take a developer with you" (Duany, 100). Again, the problem should not solely be attributed to the land developer. Because many suburbs have become outdated in their design characteristics and do not fit the needs of many of their residents, it has become necessary for government agencies to be more proactive in their relationships with land developers. By way of policy changes, tax credits, subsidies, and other government-spawned incentives, developers could more readily create communities deemed more advantageous to the public. The idea is that once several such projects are completed, the benefits—both socially and economically—can be seen by other developers and planners, and as a result, the others will begin to follow. Costs could eventually go down as more and more projects are completed.
using similar methods. This, in turn, would then lower the need for the increased
government-aided incentives—giving the government the opportunity to assist in the
creation of even newer methods, as creativity is bound to spawn creativity.

Westminster, Colorado, a large suburb near Denver, provides an example of how
land developers can—and are often willing to—create positive space with which
residents or end-users are satisfied. Westminster, similar to Las Vegas, went through
a stage of rapid population growth. That sudden growth caused Westminster’s
planners to look for better methods to their growth policies. Although the project in
this example is primarily commercially-based, the process by which it was conceived
can be used in any form of neighborhood design.

James M. Sullivan, a land developer, submitted a 37-acre plan to the city of
Westminster calling for a “power center” of big box retail stores that were to be lined
up in a row, an arrangement used repeatedly throughout the western United States.
The City’s planning commission rejected the plan, claiming it was a poorly conceived
idea. In Colorado, as in other states, it is atypical for a city to reject such a proposal
due to the sales tax revenues and other similar benefits these projects can generate for
the city. Westminster had previously allowed a similar project to be built near its city
hall that had a negative effect on the City’s image. As a result, they decided a greater
amount of scrutiny would be necessary in reviewing subsequent proposals.

At the time the original plan was submitted, Sullivan had already put a substantial
amount of money into the property for engineering and consulting purposes, and
consequently, was under extreme pressure to make the project happen. Sullivan again
met with city officials, as well as neighborhood residents, in an attempt to resolve the
situation. It became apparent that in order to realize the project and get it approved by the city, Sullivan must replan the center. What happened next proved to be beneficial for all those involved. The city planners decided to take a more direct role—they hired an architect by the name of Jim Dauer to work with Sullivan and his architect in creating a more imaginative site plan. The new team created a shopping center that related to, as well as supplemented, the surrounding neighborhood. Simply put, they thought “outside the box.” They were able to successfully create a space that was not only productive for the developer, but contributed to the residents’ quality of life.

Because the project cost slightly more than Sullivan’s original plan would have cost, the city created an incentives package to help overcome the added costs. Sullivan, ultimately surprised by the entire process, stated that “most cities simply push off additional development costs onto the private developer, but they were willing to put their money where the mouth was.” Sullivan also noted that although money is a big concern for the majority of developers, a quality-driven project such as the one in Westminster will also gain their attention. When asked if he would undertake another project in Westminster, Sullivan replied, “Absolutely.” When asked if he thought the city was too stringent regarding their process, his answer was even more surprising, “U.S. municipalities do not expect enough from developers. Cities should hold themselves in higher regard than they do. If a project is worth doing, it is worth doing well” (Bunnell, 30-33).

The key to the success of many of Westminster’s recent neighborhoods is planning a sense of community by gathering input from each of the affected parties.
The city officials realized that new projects must create interesting environments in which people work and live. They maintained a proactive role in the development process and, as a result, the project proved beneficial for all the involved parties. Dolores Hayden further supports the importance of involving multiple entities in neighborhood design when she writes: “Neither the simple corporate responses nor the simple political responses will work. Single-issue proposals need to be studied for their fullest implications for class, race, and gender. Activists who can weave these issues together, rather than pit one group’s partial solution against another group’s partial solution, will be in demand” (Hayden, Redesigning 241). Although profit is a central concern for developers—a genuine concern due to the risks involved—a project of high quality is also something that will gain their attention. A good reputation can be extremely beneficial in the realization of future projects.

Ultimately, the end-user determines whether or not a project is successful. Will the potential residents of alternatively designed neighborhoods be willing to adapt? A developer may generate a new idea and receive any necessary assistance from the government, but if the project does not fit the needs of its occupants then its worth is questionable. This is not to say that innovative thinking cannot be implemented in new design concepts, but that the developer should apply the necessary research into such concepts.

As it has been previously described, the modern suburban population continues to become more diversified. Along with this diversity comes the opportunity for developers to provide a variety of projects. While it is still common for the majority of developers to build communities that follow already established methods, there
exist niche markets that have yet to be tapped into. “Often, what buyers want is not what they get,” according to American LIVES, a consumer research group based in Oakland, California. “One of the main reasons behind this is that they couldn’t find what they wanted in their market” (6). In addition, American LIVES conducted surveys revealing that many of the elements potential buyers want are relatively inexpensive. For example, approximately two-thirds of respondents wanted natural open space, sidewalks on all streets, and biking and walking paths—features that cost less and provide more when compared to on-site golf courses or other similar amenities that only accommodate a small portion of residents (21-25).

DMB, a developer of master planned communities in Arizona, provides similar findings through their consumer research efforts. They acknowledge that on-site golf courses were particularly popular to respondents in the early 1990’s, but that more recent surveys reveal that residents desire less tangible features. The features named most often were: (1) a sense of community; (2) a sense of connection; (3) diversity; and (4) pedestrian access. Furthermore, DMB cites “time poverty” as a major concern for residents. Today, people are often so short of time that it has created a need for community development to provide places where interaction or relaxation can more readily occur (Schmitz, 6). For the developer, the success of their project often comes down to competitive advantage. If a developer can create neighborhoods that differentiate themselves from the others in a positive way, it could give them the advantage over the competitors.

In providing the open space amenities that help the developer gain a competitive edge, it is often necessary that such neighborhoods maintain a higher density level.
For several decades, however, government incentives and zoning regulations have favored low-density development. Until modifications are made regarding government policy and neighborhood design, it will be difficult for developers to adjust their methods to accommodate for higher densities. There is support, though, that could assist in realizing such modifications. According to Brent Herrington of DMB, while the idea of higher densities within suburban neighborhoods might have been avoided in the past, the current, more diversified suburban population is largely interested in such density—as long as the “smaller lots are offset by first-rate amenities and public spaces” (Schmitz, 6-11). What helps make this model work is the tradeoff from higher density (cluster-type layouts, for example) to open space, which assists in overcoming the crowded feeling that accompanies many suburban neighborhoods that do not include open space. While the number of higher-density suburban projects in the Las Vegas Valley has increased over the past several years, such projects have often failed to offer the open space “tradeoff.” This can largely be attributed to the escalating price of land with the Valley. The idea is simple—more units equal more profit. Too often this driving factor of simply providing more units promotes the creation of inefficient neighborhoods. If, however, a developer can create a neighborhood project with a number of lots per acre similar to that of the target market, but provide open space as an additional amenity, such a project increases land efficiency and can still be economically feasible for the developer. The project could also give the developer a competitive marketing advantage over the competitors, while at the same time lowering site development costs (Schmitz, 39). Genuinely successful development is attained when both developer and user are
satisfied—this should be the goal; the realization of which is greatly increased when a sound feasibility study is produced beforehand.

Recent studies reinforce the notion that ownership of the single-family home is still a common goal among U.S. citizens. Maybe more important for today’s developers, however, is that information from these same surveys indicates that there is a growing attitude of dissatisfaction with “the rest of the suburban package” (Ewing, 107). Reid Ewing, a research professor and associate professor of Urban Studies and Planning, devotes a considerable amount of time in his research to this change in attitude within the suburbs. Using a group of eleven separate studies as evidence, Ewing is able to conclude that “given the choice between compact centers and commercial strips, consumers favor the centers by a wide margin” (107-26).

Charles C. Bohl, a research associate professor and director of the Knight Program in Community Building for the School of Architecture at the University of Miami, offers a short passage that provides additional evidence that alternative neighborhood design methods—when the developer and his/her team have taken the necessary time and effort to research their feasibility—can not only provide a welcome change for the residents that will live there, but can be financially rewarding for the developer at the same time.

In sharp contrast to the suburban character of the surrounding neighborhoods and to the sprawling strip development that ripples along the fringes of Gainesville, Florida, Haile Village Center offers narrow streets and alleys, apartments and townhouses above shops and offices, a meetinghouse, and a village green. Why would the developer, Robert Kramer, have undertaken the
challenging, long-term process of planning, designing, and building a mixed-use village center with a traditional layout and design? When several possible reasons for undertaking such a project were posed to him—such as the growing desire to provide suburban towns with an identity and a sense of place; to create more walkable neighborhoods; and to develop “smarter,” more sustainable communities, he smiled and replied, “I thought the reason was to make money.” (Bohl, 8)

Kramer’s final statement is twofold in meaning. The first is simple; developers must make money from their projects, as they often dedicate a considerable amount of time, effort, and yes, money. At the same time, Kramer implies that there do indeed exist feasible development methods that can accommodate the growing needs of a diverse suburban population—methods that have previously been viewed as not feasible to the developer.

The positive influence that any alternative approach to suburban neighborhood design can have is largely dependant upon success and resident support. If a developer succeeds in creating diversified neighborhoods, it could encourage a shift in the building industry with regards to housing—compelling other developers to follow. In the past, the government has held the primary responsibility of providing communities with public facilities. Although the government can and should still play an active role, it has increasingly become the responsibility of the developer to provide such spaces. Leadership from developers is crucial in today’s home-building and neighborhood design process. Perhaps the Hollywood axiom previously mentioned: “If you build it they will come,” should be slightly altered for today’s
developers to say: “If you prove it they will follow.” It is this type of thinking that is needed to cause a shift in the way land is developed.

Ultimately, the key to creating new and alternative suburban design methods depends on the success that these designs can bring to those in charge of the money—namely the land developers. But, as Lewis Mumford, one of the most prominent figures in urban planning, wrote, “the final test of an economic system is not the tons of iron, the tanks of oil, or the miles of textiles it produces; the final test lies in its ultimate products: the sort of men and women it nurtures and the order and beauty and sanity of their communities” (Mumford). Although Mumford wrote this statement over sixty years ago, it is perhaps even more relevant today than it was back then.
CHAPTER 6

CASE STUDIES

While the majority of recent suburban projects have not given adequate attention to the neighborhood design elements listed throughout this study, especially here in the Las Vegas Valley, it is important to acknowledge some of those that do effectively utilize such elements. The projects exemplified in this chapter will cover both peripheral and infill suburban development, as this study is primarily concerned with these two types of development.

Edgewood Townhouses

An early peripheral example—constructed in the early 1970’s—is a neighborhood project called Edgewood Townhouses, located in Eugene, Oregon. Architects Morris and Redden envisioned a clustered-housing design that would allow them to include a significant amount of open space throughout the project. They understood that in order to more efficiently utilize the open space they would need the help of a qualified landscape architect and, consequently, acquired the assistance of Lloyd Bond.

One of the first important things that the design team did was to let the characteristics of the site help to determine the layout of the housing and open space
system. A small stream ran though the middle of the site and it was determined that
the stream—albeit small and not significantly noticeable to someone passing by the
site—would be the main focus. From this natural artery, a series of open spaces and
walkways were either retained or formed and fronted the groups of clustered
housing—physically linking the entire neighborhood together. In addition to the
preservation of the stream, the design team made a conscious effort to retain other
existing natural features found on the site. As the site was located in Eugene’s
wooded South Hills, they were able to incorporate existing trees and even a public
nature trail into the site.

Figure 1. Edgewood Townhouses (Girling, 117).
Two main factors contributed to the considerable amount of open space available to the residents. The first is the use of the clustered housing technique. The second can be attributed to the use of each resident’s private outdoor space. In a typical suburban neighborhood, each resident has private front and back yards. At the Edgewood Townhouses project, the design team took a significant amount of the front and backyard space and used it to increase the amount of open space. The design team did, however, acknowledge the need for some outdoor private space for each resident and was able to incorporate such a space in between the individual residence and its garage.

While Edgewood Townhouses can be used as a successful example of alternative neighborhood design, it is also important to note any of its design flaws. One of such flaws that caused some residents to complain was the close proximity of the public pathway to some of the dwelling units. Residents were comfortable when the pathway was situated further than ten feet away from the dwelling units and there was sufficient screening, but when the pathway encroached upon that ten foot distance (with no vertical separation either) and screening was minimal, it caused a sense of uneasiness among the residents in that anyone could be just a few feet away from their front door at any given moment (Girling 116-18). So even though the addition of the public open space was welcomed by the residents, the need to feel secure within their dwelling units remained important.

The collaboration between the architects and landscape architect proved to be instrumental in the success of the project through both the eyes of the residents and the architectural profession as the project won various awards—one of the most
significant awards coming from the _ASLA_ (American Society of Landscape Architects). In presenting the award, the _ASLA_ stated that they were “very impressed with the siting and the landscape architect’s role. Density was superbly dealt with [and the entire project had] an extremely well done planting plan” (_ASLA_, 99).

**Orenco Station**

On a larger scale than that of Edgewood Townhouses, Orenco Station in Hillsboro, Oregon, just outside of Portland, offers a good example of how a new development project can meet the diversified needs of potential residents. In the early 1980’s, the land was zoned for commercial development, which is why the commercially-based developer PacTrust originally bought the land. Later, in the early 1990’s, just as PacTrust began considering developing the property, Portland’s proposed Westside light-rail was granted and a stop was promised to PacTrust’s property on the condition that the area be rezoned to include residential development. The town of Hillsboro agreed to the rezoning, which prompted PacTrust to form a joint venture with the locally-based residential builder Costa Pacific Homes. Again, collaboration was a key ingredient to this project, just as it was with Edgewood Townhouses. The collaboration effort at Orenco Station, however, utilized a larger number of public agencies in both its design and construction phases. This partnership with the developing team included the following: “the city of Hillsboro; Washington County; the Tri-Met Transportation Agency; the Metro regional government; the Portland Development Commission; U.S. senator Mark Hatfield;
U.S. representative Elizabeth Furse; and many corporate entities and private citizens” (Bohl, 241).

The help of the public agencies was essential in that they modified existing policies to allow PacTrust to experiment with alternative design methods that would meet the market needs. In order to do this in an innovative and cost effective way, PacTrust completed a market research study. They found that potential residents wanted something different than the typical suburban neighborhood. They wanted “walkable streets, neighborhood shopping and meeting places, community options, and a sense of community.” Similar to the findings within this paper, PacTrust’s market research study found that many of the respondents—or potential residents—did not belong to a “traditional suburban household.” Instead, many were either single or had no children and others consisted of friends or roommates. Because of this research, along with the modified policies of the local public agencies, PacTrust was able to meet the needs of Orenco Station’s residents by utilizing several strategies that coincide with Smart Growth principles. The developer’s team, in collaboration with selected planners and architects, called for a compact design that included narrow streets, housing that was situated relatively close to sidewalks, communal green spaces, and local shops and services. They also provided a varied group of housing options that included live/work units and were located within close proximity to other employment opportunities. With the use of alleyways, they were also able to put garages behind the housing, which, in addition to the light-rail line, helped to reinforce a pedestrian environment near the main streets.
Orenco Station not only proved to be a success among its residents, but also for the developers. Even though the homes in the surrounding suburban neighborhoods
typically have more square footage and larger yards, the sales at Orenco Station have been so good that the residential units have sustained a 25 percent premium over the surrounding suburban homes (Benfield, 118-22). It is important to note that unlike the project of Edgewood Townhouses, where the site provided existing natural amenities that could be preserved and used within the new development, the original land at Orenco Station had very little—if any—distinctive natural features that could be incorporated into the design (many Las Vegas developments could relate to this sort of land situation). It was largely the utilization of the Smart Growth principles that were described, however, that gave it a new and embraced identity. Costa Pacific has been so impressed by the success of Orenco Station that they have bought a piece of land adjacent to it and plan to develop it according to many of Smart Growth principles found at Orenco Station (Benfield, 122). It has been said that success breeds success and hopefully the creativity found in the planning and design of Orenco Station can breed even more creativity from future projects.

Third Street Cottages and Marina Walk

Whereas the preceding two examples were located on the outer fringes of suburbia, the following three will address the need for suburban infill projects. The first of the infill projects, Third Street Cottages in Langley, Washington, is a small “pocket-sized” neighborhood that consists of only nine units. It can, however, be used as an example of increased density because it occupies a site that is only slightly over one-half of an acre.
Because Langley is located near the fast-growing cities of Seattle and Everett, the fear of sprawl within the small city caused local officials to implement various policies in an effort to curtail any sprawl. In the area where Third Street Cottages would eventually be built a policy existed that had an adverse effect on countering sprawl—the area was zoned such that each residential lot was to be a minimum of five acres. As the residents of the Langley grew worried that such a policy would assure sprawl-like conditions, the city’s Growth Management Committee and the Planning Advisory Board took note and modified portions of the existing land-use plans.

Figure 4. Third Street Cottages (Ross Chapin Architects).

One of the revisions to the land-use plan that helped shape the Third Street Cottages project was the allowance of higher density residential neighborhoods—up
to 16 homes per acre—as long as homes within the neighborhood do not exceed 975 total square feet (650 on the main floor) and are situated in a way that they surrounded a common, open space area. The configuration was instantly popular among local and potential residents and over half of the units sold before construction had even begun. The actual residents commended the developer for creating sense of community belonging among neighbors while still providing some private space for each individual household. The sense of community belonging was largely accomplished by means of the central common space that each unit fronted. To help increase neighborhood interaction, the parking was not placed next to the individual dwelling units, but in a location that helped guide the residents through the central common space on their way to their homes. The inclusion of private space was accomplished through the allocation of a small yard for each unit that’s boundaries consisted of a low fence, trees, and other vegetation, which gave the users of the space a sense of privacy without the space being intrusive to the communal area. And while the density of this project is already considerably higher than that of the average suburban neighborhood, there is still a significant amount of private space between the houses that could have been allocated to the public open space if needed be (see Figure 4).

Not only does the project utilize several Smart Growth strategies—namely infill development, increased density, preservation of village character, an increased sense of community belonging, proximity to shops and services, and even environmentally-friendly construction methods—but the actual residents are making an effort to live their lives in harmony with the Smart Growth strategies. For example, each owner
owns only one automobile, if any, and most of the residents walk the three blocks to the Langley village center to do their shopping (Benfield, 127-30).

Similar to Orenco Station, the success of Third Street Cottages has prompted the construction of similar projects in the area—demonstrating that even a simple project with a simple main idea can be very successful for all of the involved parties. And even though Third Street Cottages is a relatively small project, its basic design strategies can be applied to larger-scale development projects, such as Marina Walk in Pittsburg, California.

Figure 5. Marina Walk showing possible open space corridors linked to the centralized park (base image: Schmitz, 35).

With some minor modifications, Marina Walk, a revitalization project located on what was once a brownfield site, could exemplify the potential impact that the Third
Street Cottages project could have on a project of a larger scale. As shown in Figure 5, each block consists of homes surrounding a large green space. This entire green space, however, is fenced off into private back yards for each residence, which is a common practice in most suburban neighborhoods. A common problem with this is that the fenced off space is so small that it is often an inefficient use of space. The space could, perhaps, be better utilized by reducing the size of the private back yards and converting a portion of that green space into a communal green space that is networked to the existing centralized park.

While it is true that a portion of the suburban population still prefers a layout similar to that of Marina Walk, in which each resident has their own individual back yard to its largest extent, this study has shown that a growing number of suburban residents would prefer more open space—even at the expense of the private back yard. The goal should be to provide a variety of project types on a variety of scales to meet the different needs of the current, and future, suburban population.

The Crossings

The construction of strip malls and automobile-dependent shopping centers has been prevalent within the United States—and especially here in the Southwestern states—over the past few decades. In recent years, however, many of these shopping centers have become either unsuccessful or somewhat dilapidated. Because of this, there exists a great need to rejuvenate these areas, while at the same time possibly filling some of the diversified housing needs of today's suburban residents. The
Crossings, located in the suburban city of Mountain View, California, provides a good example of such a project.

On the site where The Crossings project would later be realized existed an auto-oriented shopping mall that was built in the 1960’s. Over time, as newer shopping centers were built in the same area, the shopping mall became less and less profitable until it was ultimately deemed a failure in 1991. In an attempt to encourage a developer to redevelop the property, Mountain View city officials modified the zoning in the area to include residential dwellings. The city’s efforts were rewarded as TPG Development acquired the land and began planning the 18-acre site. After the developer’s preliminary design was rejected, city officials suggested that TPG attain the planning and architectural services of Peter Calthorpe to revise the plan, which they eventually did.

Figure 6. The Crossings. Original shopping center (inset) and the neighborhood designed to replace it (Calthorpe).
Because the city was concerned that their recent, and projected, growth would only continue to extend outward under their existing land-use policies, they revised some policies to emphasize higher densities in certain zones. The Crossings happened to be in one of these zones so Calthorpe’s plan called for a mixture of apartments, row houses, townhouses, single-family homes (placed on small lots), and even some retail space. When the project was completed, the residential density averaged 22 units per acre. While the density seems to be a relatively high for a suburban neighborhood, the local residents do not feel that the space is too confined. “It’s not at all confining, since you can walk to everything,” said resident Bob Michel. Other residents echo Michel’s statement noting that there is even a sense of spaciousness because of the networked system of parks, well-placed landscaping, wide sidewalks and other pedestrian paths, tree-lined streets, and the proximity to shops and employment. Like the residents of Orenco Station and Third Street Cottages, many of The Crossings residents walk to work or to do their shopping. They value the idea of living in a more sustainable manner. For many, the fact that the developer was able to recycle building material, trees, and other forms of vegetation from the shopping center that originally occupied the site only adds to the project’s success (Benfield, 96-99).

At the time that The Crossings was built, the Center for Livable Communities listed it as the fastest selling project in the region, again proving that alternative suburban neighborhood design can be highly beneficial to both residents and developers. In a statement that echoes one of the main sentiments of this study, the San Francisco Chronicle wrote: What [The Crossings] offers is an option—another
way that people can live in what once were the suburbs. And the more options we have in the Bay Area, the better off all of us will be” (Benfield, 99).

The redevelopment of aging and under-utilized strip malls and shopping centers is an efficient strategy that can be used to rejuvenate older suburban neighborhoods. In addition to The Crossings, several other similar projects in California have been constructed or are in the process of construction that can provide the Las Vegas Valley with a number of examples from which to learn.

While the market needed to realize projects such as the ones described in this chapter has been somewhat limited over the past several decades (both in the number of people and the feasible locations), this study has shown that a growing portion of today’s homebuyers are looking for the lifestyle and amenities that these projects often provide. It is also important to note that even though Las Vegas might not have quite the same desirable climate as the case study cities found in California, most of the same principles can be applied. For example, the idea of a walkable neighborhood in Las Vegas might, at first, seem unsound due to the hot summers, but could be achievable because much of the remainder of the year—and even the summer evenings and nights—are pleasant. It is true that not all of the information attained from the previous case studies is completely applicable to Las Vegas or most other cities. In fact, adaptation of the Smart Growth principles utilized in these case studies will be essential in the success of new projects, and the unique characteristics that such adaptation causes can often be beneficial in selling the project.
CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS / FINAL THOUGHTS

Even with the frequently negative attitude in today's society regarding suburbia and its development methods, it is necessary for the involved stakeholders to remember that the majority of U.S. residents live within the suburbs. Because of this fact, a high level of importance should be given to the design of such neighborhoods. This is not to say that revitalization procedures within the central cities should be overlooked; instead, progress should be made in both the suburb and the city.

Different people require different space in their efforts to find happiness; whether that space is located within the city or within a suburb depends on each individual's preference. The point is that a more balanced relationship is needed—one that provides more cooperation between city and suburb. Just as the city should tap into some of the suburban ideals that have caused so many people to want to live within the suburbs, so too should suburban designers take a more proactive role in utilizing useful central city design methods that better utilize space and promote interaction among residents. In the words of Robert Fishman, "there is no choice but to accept the complex challenges of 'the new city' [i.e. modern suburbia] and to seek out urbanity where we find it" (Fishman, 39). Fishman's words echo one of the
underlying conclusions of this study. It is evident that the suburbs have become increasingly independent of the central city in many ways—namely housing, shopping, and even employment locations. This has caused many scholars to believe that they are no longer “sub” anything (Palen, 223), and while this study would agree, for the most part, with that belief, it slightly differs in that it finds that the suburbs are still suburban—they are still what their name implies. This is because with regards to urban features, the suburb continues to be a subordinate of—or secondary to—the central city. This is not to say that the suburbs have not developed into something more than what the term suburb originally implied—and, perhaps, the term suburb does not successfully define this evolved suburban environment—but that it is still one of the characteristics of today’s suburbs that contributes to the common perception that many suburbs lack a sense of belonging.

The main objective of this study, as the title suggests, is to raise awareness of the need to diversify suburban neighborhood design methods in order to accommodate an increasingly varied group of potential home-buyers—or renters for that matter. While various examples have been used to demonstrate how such diversity can take place, perhaps what is even more significant for planners, architects, and developers are certain elements that, if taken into serious consideration during the development process, could foster healthier neighborhoods. These elements, which will subsequently be reviewed, are relatively straightforward design approaches; they could, however, require the adaptation of existing suburban development techniques. Such adaptation begins with the need for the housing industry to widely acknowledge the changing needs of the current U.S. population. As it has been noted in this study,
the "traditional" household that included a father, mother, and children is no longer the norm—only accounting for a quarter of the suburban population. Making this need even more critical is data provided by the U.S. Census Bureau that projects the U.S. population to increase by 48 percent over the next 50 years. So it appears as though it is not a question of if substantial growth will occur but how we will react to it.

As a starting point, we must put the "community" back into our communities. From recent studies and surveys directed towards suburban residents, it is apparent that residents feel there is a lack of community belonging. While it is often the case that they live in close proximity to their neighbors, their neighborhoods are often set up in such a way that such proximity does little to encourage healthy interaction between residents. Perhaps too much attention is given to the individual, private yard—often at the expense of more public spaces such as streets, pedestrian paths, and parks.

In an effort to promote a sense of belonging within a community, neighborhood plans might include more mixed-use development strategies that support higher densities and encourage walking to shops and the workplace. Plans might also include a wider variety of housing types—from the single-family detached home to townhouses and apartments. Many opportunities for development also exist within older suburban neighborhoods where most of the infrastructure is already in place and where public transportation is more readily available. Additionally, developers should be encouraged, by local government incentives or policies, to seek community involvement in the design of their neighborhoods so that all of the involved parties...
can better understand the needs and goals of one another. These New Urbanist and Smart Growth strategies—when modified to work with the unique characteristics of any given site—strive to efficiently reinstate the community belonging that suburban residents feel has been lacking in their neighborhoods. While good examples exist throughout the United States of communities that have utilized some of these Smart Growth or New Urbanist principles, their effects on the Las Vegas Valley have been minimal. This does, however, provide the Valley with a good opportunity to improve upon its current neighborhood design methods.

Another critical element that should be better addressed in the development process is the inclusion of Nature within our neighborhoods. Drawing closer to Nature was, after all, one of the primary objectives of the early suburbs. And while suburbia has evolved in many aspects since those early suburbs, human interaction with Nature and the landscape should again be made possible through modern designs. Such interaction promotes an irreplaceable sense of health—both in body and mind. This connection with Nature is too often missing within today’s suburbs, but there exist various approaches by which developers can again begin to integrate Nature into their neighborhood projects. It has been documented that the current suburban population is becoming increasingly more accepting of the idea of higher density neighborhoods as long as they provide open space amenities. This type of neighborhood can often be attained through the use of clustered housing. The current housing market even provides the opportunity for some developments to take land that has historically been saved for private back yards and use it for public open space. While open space created by clustered housing techniques can enhance a
neighborhood just as a standalone piece of land, their positive effect can be significantly improved if multiple open spaces are networked together—either throughout a single project or better yet, throughout multiple projects.

It is true, however, that such a networked system of open spaces—especially between different projects—could prove to be difficult to realize unless local governments and agencies adapt their policies to promote this type of networked space. These agencies, therefore, will play a crucial role if we are ever to see these systems extensively utilized throughout suburban neighborhoods.

It is important to note that while the term “open space” is typically used to describe parks or other recreational areas, the description should be expanded to include sidewalks and streets. This is not to say that modern suburban neighborhoods do not have enough streets—in fact, wide suburban streets are far too common—but that they could be utilized more efficiently to enhance the character of a neighborhood and promote social interaction among its residents. When efficiently used, a street—similar to other open space elements—can favorably contribute to the urbanity of a suburban neighborhood.

Just as government and local agencies will likely have to play active roles in order for open space elements to obtain their full potential, the need to include the landscape architect in any neighborhood design project is equally important. The creation—or protection in some cases—of these Nature-related spaces requires careful planning. The end product cannot be an afterthought. Good landscape architects have the required training and experience to acknowledge the need to let the site dictate where open space should exist for any given project. A neighborhood
that successfully incorporates Nature into design is not only healthier for the home-
owners or renters that live within, but for the environment as well.

Finally, the last major component that neighborhood design must deal with is the
economic feasibility of any given project. The concept is simple: in the real world
developers and their investors must make a profit on their investment. Development
projects require that significant financial risks be taken by their investors—and with
these significant financial risks typically comes the desire for an equally significant
profit. For this reason, developers have continued to build in the same manner that
they have for years because the financial returns are time-tested. With the emerging
changes to the suburban population, however, it will become increasingly
advantageous—even necessary perhaps—for developers to evolve with these changes.
The Las Vegas Valley provides a good example of a changing market. Over the last
several years, the housing in the Valley has grown at a record pace. Because of this,
developers could build financially successful “communities” that did very little to
serve many of the needs of its residents other than simply providing a home. The
market was so strong that it did not really matter much what type of development was
built—however generic or poorly constructed—the project would quickly sell out.
During the last year, however, the market has slowed considerably to a point at which
project-type and quality can give one developer an advantage over another. With the
diverse needs of today’s suburban population exists the opportunity to find special
niches within the market and tailoring a project to meet those needs can generate a
considerable profit for the developer. While a feasibility study is important to any
project-type, its importance is heightened when a more unique project is planned.
Again, the government can and should promote these new project-types. The success, and often the need, of such a public-private relationship can be seen in the examples given of Westminster, Orenco Station, Third Street Cottages, and The Crossings. If the government can alleviate some of the financial costs of some of the initial new project-types, and such projects are successful, not only will potential home-buyers notice, but so too will the competition. Costs might then start to go down as these newer project-types become more common—allowing the government to redirect its help towards even newer design methods.

There is no doubt that it will take public awareness in order to prompt government and local agencies to change their policies, which is why the already established movements of New Urbanism and Smart Growth can be so helpful. Smart Growth, for example, has had such a strong backing among U.S. citizens that many cities and states have passed certain legislature promoting Smart Growth principles. One city that has adopted plans and ordinances based off such principles is Davidson, North Carolina. Through the implementation of new policies set forth in the Davidson Land Plan, revised to include Smart Growth principles in 1995, and the 2001 Planning Ordinance, the city of Davidson has been able to attract developers that are willing to build neighborhoods that promote a sense of community belonging.

First, the city strongly promotes the revitalization of existing neighborhoods and buildings. When new neighborhoods are planned, they are to include a diverse mixture of lot sizes, housing types, and parks—with housing unit being no more than a five-minute walk from the nearest park. The city also requires that all new neighborhoods be connected via a networked system of streets, pedestrian pathways
(including bicycle paths), and green spaces. Tree-lined streets are narrow and designed to accommodate sidewalks and parking on both sides in an effort to promote resident interaction and minimize speeding. As the success of Davidson's policy changes has caused housing prices to increase, which has gained the attention of an increasing number of developers, city officials have also implemented another Smart Growth principle; they have required that 12.5 percent of all new housing is priced in a range that families making less than the county's median income can afford (Smart Growth Online).

Citizen support for Smart Growth principles is also evident on a larger scale as legislation has been passed that applies to the entire state of Maryland. In 1997, Maryland's General Assembly created a Smart Growth initiative that provided incentives in the form of development funding and tax credits to both developer and resident. For example, priority funding is reserved for development in targeted Smart Growth areas—including brownfield sites. Also, tax credits are given to residents who live near their workplace and to qualifying shop and business owners for the creation of new jobs within a targeted area. In all, the state of Maryland has over 80 programs that utilize Smart Growth principles—reflecting the increasing popularity of such principles among United States citizens. (Maryland Department of Planning, website).

"People today are not so much tired as they are bored. A developer's goal should be to create neighborhoods that are stimulating and that encourage and support residents' self-actualization—personal growth and fulfillment that is consistent with one's personal values" (Schmitz, 53). By more earnestly addressing the
neighborhood design elements previously listed—and adapting them where specific site characteristics dictate—we can begin to establish alternative planning and design methods that can contribute to more diversified living conditions within our communities—allowing potential residents the opportunity to make a wider range of choices with regard to such conditions. And while the alternative methods will ultimately be used by the developer, the initial implementation of such methods must come from local, state, and even federal government agencies; if there is one thing that the city, state, and country have significant control over it is the use of land.

Potential methods might include the following: the allowance of planned unit developments, clustered housing, and zero-lot-line housing in any residential area (leave it up to the market to determine where these types of housing can occur); an expansion of the possible areas where mixed-use development may occur; more flexible density and housing type allowances in existing residential areas where the opportunity exists to revitalize greyfield sites or even develop vacant sites; incentives given for higher densities, preservation of open space, public space facilities, varied housing types, and mixed-income housing; and finally, heightened encouragement for citizen participation.

Even though the implementation of these alternative methods into government policies is important if developers are to meet the needs of today’s residents, it does not mean such implementation will be easy. Meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse suburban population will likely require improved knowledge on the part of city planners and other government officials and institutions. Several states, with Maryland and Oregon leading the way, are increasing the level of planning assistance
and resources offered to the local governments found within their boundaries. Many of the planning methods and guidelines that have proved successful in various cities can be found on the Internet through city, county, and state websites—this can be a great resource for those local government agencies that are somewhat deficient with regards to growth management.

Another option available to local governments is the increased use of college internship programs. The growth management of many government agencies is often lacking because they do not have sufficient resources or even the capacity to implement new planning methods. Interns could begin to fill this void in some instances by providing research, carrying out case studies and surveys, generating community awareness, and simply by providing new ideas to the often routine-oriented work found in the “real world.” At the same time, the college intern is exposed to real world problems—making the experience positive for both sides. Just because community members and government officials have finished their college educations does not mean that there is no need for further education. Increased use of college interns can provide this additional education not only by providing their own time and ideas, but the time and ideas of their professors, who have spent years researching topics that could be of great use to our communities.

Through the utilization of these alternative planning and design methods, suburban neighborhoods designed for diversification can, and should, take on a number of different appearances. There are two general neighborhood composition types, however, that can be implemented by developers to meet the needs of a neighborhood’s potential residents.
The first type of neighborhood composition might call for a neighborhood to be set up to meet the particular needs and desires for one group of people, while other neighborhoods are also set up to fulfill the particular needs of other groups of people. For example, to accommodate those families or individuals with a more active lifestyle, a neighborhood might provide amenities that more easily promote that type of lifestyle—such as a swimming pool, fitness center, or parks with jogging paths. Conversely, there are families and individuals who prefer a more relaxed lifestyle and might benefit more from other types of amenities that promote a sense of tranquility where residents could congregate and interact—both socially and intellectually.

Higher density housing is also becoming increasingly common for suburban residents as long as the increased density results in more open space and more opportunities for interaction on a variety of levels. There are still those, however, that do not prefer higher densities and the need to accommodate them through better neighborhood design exists as well. Still, there are other families and individuals that will have even different needs and provide other design opportunities. Ultimately, this first type of neighborhood composition would accommodate those potential residents that want their neighborhood to meet their unique needs.

The second type of neighborhood composition might include a form of inclusionary zoning that provides a variety of housing types for residents with a variety of income levels. Whereas the first type of neighborhood composition calls for different neighborhoods to fulfill the needs of its residents, this second type would fulfill the different resident needs within the same neighborhood. During the past several decades, city officials and developers have done little to integrate affordable
housing into the mainstream suburban population. It is not, however, in the best interest of our communities, and of those families with lower incomes, to always concentrate affordable housing in isolated areas. Fortunately, an increasing amount of the current suburban population is searching for new methods of development—methods that could lend themselves to more mixed-income housing. This is not to say that inclusionary zoning will be easy to implement, on the contrary, it will most likely require the assistance of local governments and agencies through revised policies that might require a certain portion of new development within a project to include integrated, affordable housing. Local governments could also offer incentives to developers by helping to secure land or through low interest loans and tax credits.

As for the design of the neighborhoods that would use inclusionary zoning in the form of mixed-income housing, it is important that the affordable housing blends in with the mainstream housing. The lower income units cannot look so out of place that they drive out potential middle and upper income residents. This generates the need for qualified architects to be an integral part of the design process. Mixed-income housing is not a new planning method for U.S. cities by any means. While such housing used to be fairly common, its implementation in modern suburban development, however, has been particularly underutilized.

Whichever of these two types of neighborhood composition is used in creating a neighborhood, their ability to promote community interaction on a larger scale could be greatly increased if the neighborhoods overlapped or were networked together. This could be done through the use of pedestrian pathways, open space corridors, or strategically designed street patterns that linked the neighborhood amenities of one
neighborhood to another. The main objective is to create a wide range of options available to suburban residents that promote a more healthy and enjoyable lifestyle.

Providing the opportunity for community interaction, connection with the external landscape, and comfort within one's own neighborhood should all be characteristics found in modern suburban design. Such characteristics are not all found in many suburban neighborhoods today—often because developers have not found ways to incorporate them into their business plans. Consequently, it is necessary that sound feasibility studies be prepared in order for developers to begin to adapt to the changing lifestyles of suburban residents. Those developers who are the first to find successful methods by which to accommodate the changing demands could easily find themselves having a strong financial advantage over those who simply continue with the static methods so often used today. Projects derived from such alternative design methods would then not only become feasible, but very profitable. "A new life demands new forms. Americans are often living the new life, while not yet making the spatial changes that will provide the new forms" (Hayden, 189). Change, adaptation, innovation—these are all words that must describe the future of suburban design and their implementation requires the collaboration of the government, developers, planners, architects, landscape architects, the general public, and any other involved parties.

Memorable and meaningful design derives from the opportunity of experiencing space—not only through our interaction with others but by means of our senses. Perhaps the architectural firm of Bohlin Cywinski Jackson states the need for intelligent adaptation best with their design philosophy:
This is a time in which belief is often overwhelmed by exponential change. Even in the most serious architectural circles, intellectual games and superficial dogma can take the place of affirmation, and the mediocrity and deadness of much of our environment continue to spread.

Yet, in all of our surroundings there is great richness and power. Belief in the sensuality of place, the emotive qualities of materials, and the ability to give pleasure and insight, to comfort, and to transport, can produce humane and spirited architecture. It is our belief that exceptional architecture comes from the search for solutions which respond to the particular circumstances inherent in each situation.

Increasingly, we have come to see that, in a sense, circumstances are infinite and that working within any one set of habits is too limiting. We must be alive to the subtleties of place, whether manmade or natural; to the varied nature of humans and their particular activities; to the qualities of their institutions; and to the nature of the means with which we build. With both intellect and intuition, we seek solutions that respond to the web of circumstances at hand.

Over the years the interplay of architects within our practice and our responses to more complex and demanding programs and varied environments have broadened our view of the circumstances that affect our work. We are peeling away the layers of our habits and preconceptions. We require open-mindedness, willingness, gentleness—a soft, yet no-holds-barred approach.

(Bohlin Cywinski Jackson, website)
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