CHAPTER 1: WHY GREAT NEIGHBORHOODS?

GREAT NEIGHBORHOODS LOWER PUBLIC COSTS

Infrastructure makes modern life possible – it may be unromantic, but it's true. We could not go on living our normal lives without roads, water, sewer, trash removal, snow plowing, police and fire protection, or schools. Each of these costs money, and they are typically funded with local money, generated from local property taxes.

The costs of infrastructure and community services are not fixed, however. The level of expense depends on how suitably different developments relate to one another, how well the buildings within a given development are laid out, and – above all – how far from each other they are located.

If you are providing water to 100 families, you'll need to provide 100 faucets; but if they each live on two acres you'll need a lot more pipe than if they all live in an apartment building. One survey of costs of community services estimated that public savings from Great Neighborhoods-type developments could be $10,000 for a single-family house.[1] Research has found that development patterns that consume less land can lower public costs from 5 to 75 percent.[2]

Quality, accessible housing that is built on vacant neighborhood land in Madison, uses existing infrastructure instead of new roads and utility lines.

Great Neighborhoods reduce the costs of infrastructure and community services in various ways. Existing Great Neighborhoods that are maintained, rehabilitated, or retrofitted already have roads and utility networks. Most new infill projects within these existing neighborhoods also require low levels of public investments for infrastructure. New Great Neighborhoods do require new public expenditures, but because such neighborhoods are compact, there is less distance between dwellings, thus decreasing costs to property taxpayers in comparison to conventional subdivisions.

A pleasing side effect of reducing infrastructure costs is that housing becomes more affordable. Many municipalities require developers to pay for the cost of public improvements. Developers pass these costs on to consumers, raising the selling price. Lowering the cost of infrastructure can reduce the cost of new housing.

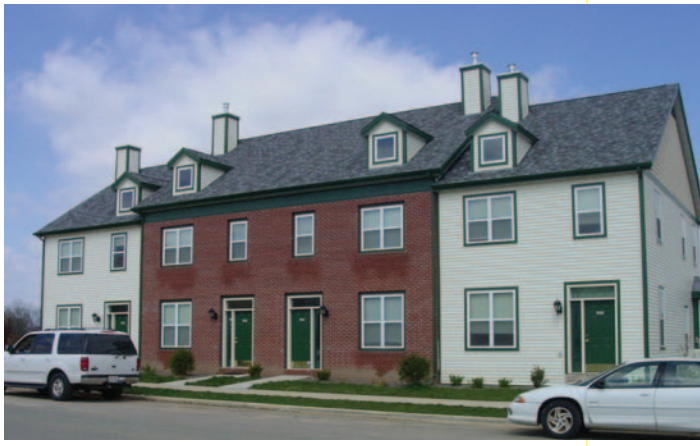
GREAT NEIGHBORHOODS MEET THE NEEDS OF ALL DANE COUNTY CITIZENS

From *Leave it to Beaver* through *The Brady Bunch* through *Everybody Loves Raymond*, the American Dream (as seen through the prism of pop culture) has often been portrayed as owning a big single-family house, set on a large lawn, with two cars and a garage to park them in. Certainly, for many families – particularly many married couples with school-age children who live at home – this ideal may be the preferred housing option. But it would be a mistake to assume that the housing preferences of one relatively small demographic group represent the entire population's desires.

In fact, the vast majority of Dane County households in the year 2000 – more than three in four – were something *other than* married couples with children at home.[3] Most of Dane County's population is composed of singles, couples without children, empty nesters, and retirees, and they each have very different housing needs and desires from those traditional nuclear families. Their "American Dreams" come in a wide array of sizes, locations, and configurations. (In other words, we should remember that *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *The Cosby Show*, and *Friends* express equally valid American Dreams).

Closely spaced, historic homes front an attractive street on Madison's East Side. Here, this neighborhood feel creates a welcoming space for an event that area schoolchildren have organized to benefit a school orchestra program.

Great Neighborhoods – both new and historic – can comfortably contain a wide range of housing types. Single-family, duplex, townhouse, and multi-family structures can all comfortably co-exist in the same neighborhood. Furthermore, because Great Neighborhoods offer a high level of visual and structural variety, they make mixing rental with owner-occupied properties viable. Such mixes of housing types and ownership arrangements allow people of different ages, incomes, and family types to live in the same neighborhood. Which is to say, Great Neighborhoods foster diversity and vitality.



Town homes in Midtown Commons, a new Great Neighborhood on the southwest side of Madison. Condos are becoming increasingly popular not only with working adults, but also with retirees – who travel frequently and do not want to worry about yard maintenance and snow removal.

GREAT NEIGHBORHOODS GIVE PEOPLE TRANSPORTATION CHOICES

Today, both revitalized old neighborhoods and new ones are designed with an understanding that people need and want cars. Great Neighborhoods differ from conventional developments since they allow for the personal mobility that the car offers, without removing all other transportation options, making us solely dependent on our cars. Great Neighborhoods are designed to make walking, biking, transit, and the car *all* viable, so that each can be used when appropriate: no one would choose to walk, bike, or ride a bus to the plumbing store in order to buy a bathtub, but by the same token, no one should have to get in the car just to buy a cup of coffee and the morning paper, or to take the dog to the park.

Bicycling along pleasant streets is an appealing – and practical – way to get around well-designed neighborhoods.

In Great Neighborhoods, many of the trips people regularly make – shopping, dining out, playing in a park, or visiting friends – involve relatively short distances, and can be made on foot or by bicycle. This is by design. Furthermore, Great Neighborhoods make these non-car modes yet more appealing by creating pleasant, safe, and direct travel routes: attractive streets, short blocks, and accessible sidewalks.

Great Neighborhoods also make transit service more viable. Because of their compactness, they put more people within an easy walk of bus (or rail) stops. In addition, most Great Neighborhoods are designed to get denser toward their centers, locating duplexes, townhouses, and multi-family dwellings near the heart of the district. This sort of landscape creates natural nodes and spines for transit service. Altogether, these features mean that transit operators can run their vehicles over shorter distances (lowering costs), with more passengers (raising revenues).

Evidence clearly shows that people will drive less if they live in more compact neighborhoods with transportation choices and walkable destinations.[4] Replacing even a small number of car trips with walking, bicycling, or transit can reduce traffic congestion and pollution, and can enhance public health.

GREAT NEIGHBORHOODS PROMOTE HEALTHY LIFESTYLES

Along with diet, inactivity is the major cause of rising levels of obesity in America. Certainly, individuals must take some responsibility for their level of physical activity (or lack thereof), but the physical environment frames their choices. In places where the car is the only real option for getting around, people do not walk much, and therefore are more prone to obesity and associated health problems.

Recent research documented – for the first time – the correlation between the type of place people live in and their activity levels, weight, and health.[5] After controlling for age, education, gender, race, and other factors, the study found that people living in dispersed, conventional developments are likely to walk less, weigh more, and suffer from hypertension more than people who live in more compact neighborhoods.

GREAT NEIGHBORHOODS PRESERVE LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Because they are less dispersed than conventional subdivisions, Great Neighborhoods consume less land. That means that they leave more land for other things, such as preserving wetlands, viewsheds, woodlands, or other natural or scenic features. These natural areas can serve any number of purposes, some with direct benefits to the neighborhood, others with broader benefits.

For example, wetlands, forests, and prairies are natural water purifiers. They can capture stormwater, recharge aquifers, clean runoff, and prevent flooding. Areas of wildness can also provide critical wildlife habitat – especially if linked to a larger network of environmental corridors – and they afford areas for passive recreation.

GREAT NEIGHBORHOODS PROMOTE CIVIC SPACES AND SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

Open spaces in Great Neighborhoods are consciously created as civic places. They become organizing features of neighborhood design, helping to determine the location and orientation of homes and businesses, and helping to determine how people will move around their neighborhood. Great Neighborhoods' open spaces are where residents play, gather, meet, and relax – *together*.

While many Great Neighborhoods offer residents and owners private backyards, these tend to be less expansive than in a conventional subdivision. Instead, Great Neighborhoods favor the front side of the house, where the public realm meets the private, as the place to relax, play with the kids or pets, or just watch the neighbors walk by.

Great Neighborhoods also integrate plazas, vest-pocket parks, and other small open spaces within easy walking distance of homes. The homes and businesses that face these civic spaces allow neighbors to keep an eye on things, which increases both the perception and the reality of a safe and secure environment. These neighborhoods also feature sidewalks and on-street parking, which allow local parks to accommodate

Middleton Hills (in the City of Middleton) is a local example of a Great Neighborhood that preserved key natural features in its midst. This compact new development preserved a wetland within the neighborhood.

Public spaces bind neighborhoods together. Here, an Independence Day celebration at a neighborhood park in Madison.

festivals and gatherings (whether organized or impromptu) without the need for vast areas of surface parking. Finally, most Great Neighborhoods – both old and new – have access to larger parks with play fields or natural areas. Such larger-scale parks are frequently located on the edge of neighborhoods, where they can serve several areas at once.

GREAT NEIGHBORHOODS SUPPORT EFFICIENT USE OF ENERGY

There is a growing demand for Great Neighborhoods that use resources and energy efficiently for long-term sustainability. Decisions made when building a new home or addition, remodeling an existing home, or selecting products have a lasting impact on the environment and livability of our homes and neighborhoods.

Energy Efficiency

Proper design for energy efficient buildings combines appropriate building placement, optimal insulation, a sealed building envelope, and balanced ventilation in order to conserve energy, improve the health and comfort of the occupants, and reduce operating costs. When selecting appliances and lighting fixtures choose high efficiency models and look for the Energy Star label. Whether for new construction or remodeling, energy efficient methods and design make for more affordable housing that contributes to healthy and vibrant neighborhoods. Because energy costs are lower, a greater number of people can afford to purchase homes and create a sense of "ownership" in the neighborhood. Reduced energy use also means less environmental impact from the burning of fossil fuels. Ultimately, these savings contribute to a healthier economy, a cleaner environment, and an improved quality of life. Please look at the "Energy Efficiency for Great Neighborhoods" appendix for more information.

Renewable Energy

Renewable energy such as solar hot water heating, wind and photovoltaics can be incorporated into the mix to achieve long-term sustainability. Placing small renewable power systems in residential and business settings--where the energy is needed and used--can help reduce the need for new or upgraded central power plants and electricity transmission systems. By incorporating "neighborhood renewables" into the generating mix, residents can help contribute to the long-term sustainability of their neighbors.

Investing in locally available renewable energy sources such as solar (for water heating and generating electricity), wind power, biomass and geothermal energy have environmental as well as economic benefits. While these options are currently more expensive than fossil

fuels, they reduce dependence on non-local energy sources, keep energy dollars in the community and reduce air emissions related to acid rain and global warming. Please look at the "Renewable Energy in Great Neighborhoods" appendix for more information.

IN SHORT ...

"Great Neighborhood" is a term that describes a set of qualities that serve to make a neighborhood a *place*, not merely a scattering of residences. It describes a way of building places that was taken for granted before the Second World War, but has since been supplanted by low-density, auto-dependent developments.

Great Neighborhoods have a diversity of housing types, and thus a diversity of kinds of people. Such places use civic spaces as organizing principles, balancing the private and public realms. They allow transportation choices – serving pedestrians, bikers, and transit, as well as cars. They take up less land, allowing the preservation of natural and scenic amenities. They promote more active, healthier lifestyles. And because they reduce infrastructure and service costs for both new residents and existing property-taxpayers, Great Neighborhoods are more efficient than conventional developments from a fiscal standpoint.