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New Urbanism: What Will the Next 50 Years Be Like?

by John Peter Barie, AIA, CNU, Chair, CNU Illinois

As we celebrate the 100th Anniversary of the Burnham Plan (www.burnhamplan100.org) that gave Chicago our sweeping green lakefront and the “emerald necklace” of County Forest Preserves the U.S. Census Bureau tells us in the next 34 years we 300 million Americans will be joined by another 92 million (excluding immigration). Where will these people live, work, play, worship, buy, sell and serve?

The pattern of human settlement informs us that man is meant to dwell in cities. Aristotle wrote that the best life for individual human beings is a life of moral and intellectual virtue lived in community with others, and most particularly in a “polis.” America as we know it began as a small new world of villages.

However, World War II changed America in profound ways, creating “Rosie the Riveter,” heralding the entrance of women into the workforce in large numbers. Our parents thrived under the GI Bill, began to accumulate personal wealth, and gave birth to “Baby Boomers.” We engineered and built the Interstate Highway System, and automobile ownership became commonplace because of cheap gas.

As these changes occurred they impacted our quality of life. We stopped taking trains and trolleys to work. Families left cities and small towns for suburbia, and became dependent on the automobile for their livelihood. Not only did we abandon Main Street for strip shopping centers and the mall; we stopped walking to church, school, the corner store, the bus stop, or the doctor’s office.

Do any of these problems sound familiar? Your commute to work seems to be getting longer and more congested. You have to drive everywhere, whether it’s to pick up a newspaper or to take your children to weekend activities. Your town is slowly losing the unique character and historic buildings that gave it a distinct identity, and new buildings going up are characterless, unattractive, or unwelcoming.

How did we get here? First, the prevailing form of land development, popularly known as Sprawl emerged after World War II. We wrote zoning

ordinances that require low density, and a rigorous separation of uses; houses here, shopping there, schools over yonder, and roads everywhere.

Transportation policy makers implemented street standards that are insensitive to human needs, resulting in a built environment where the automobile dominates our landscape beginning with two-lane highways that are expanded to four, then six and, last month with great fanfare, to eight lanes on I-88.

The time has come to reverse these trends and begin to restore our quality of life. Enter New Urbanism. The Illinois Chapter of the Congress for the New Urbanism is one leader of an American movement to:

- restore urban centers,
- reconfigure sprawling suburbs,
- conserve environmental assets, and
- preserve our built legacy.

What is New Urbanism? It’s really Old Urbanism. If you grew up in a small town or a city the principles sound remarkably similar: pedestrian-friendly sidewalks, narrow interconnected tree-lined streets, and calm traffic with two-way streets and parking on both sides. The Principles of New Urbanism are defined by a Charter, developed by a variety of people including architects, planners, and citizens from various walks of life, scholars, elected officials, and developers. The charter is divided into three categories: 1) The Region, Metropolis, City and Town, 2) The Neighborhood, District, and Corridor, and 3) The block, street and building. You can read the details by visiting www.cnuillinois.org.

Let’s explore how each of you can join the movement to end sprawl and improve the quality of our daily lives.

We’ll start with the block, street, and the building since they are recognizable as places we live, work, shop, worship or recreate. Your block may be a street of single family homes, or you could live on a block within a short walk of a neighborhood commercial center with apartments above shops, or a high-rise apartment building a block or two from a downtown core



Friday night jazz concert at Village Green New Town in St. Charles, MO.

and a Metra line. The scenario where you must drive five minutes to anywhere — the street of single family homes — is the most prominent in suburbia.

At the next level your block, street and building are part of a “neighborhood,” an identifiable area that encourages citizens to take responsibility for their maintenance and evolution. In suburbia you live in a subdivision with a catchy name, 30’-wide streets, no services close by and you look at your neighbor’s garage door.

To get someplace you travel along the “corridor,” an essential element of development and redevelopment in the metropolis. Corridors are regional connectors of neighborhoods and districts; they range from boulevards and rail lines to rivers and parkways. Randall Road is a corridor, and where do people live? Five minutes or more from the corridor, few within walking distance.

Reflect for a moment on the suburban landscape I have just described or one more familiar to you. It is most likely hostile to mobility by any mode — including the automobile. The reason why? Our streets provide few connections, and large roads divide places that should be an easy stroll apart, creating what is best described as mind numbing congestion!

New Urbanism principles call for neighborhoods that are compact, pedestrian-friendly, and offer a mix of uses. Vital neighborhoods offer three realms: 1) home, 2) workplace, 3) the great good place (an informal gathering place such as a — continued on page after next

Kane County Electronics Recycling

by Nate Stelton

It's a crisp Saturday morning and cars are lined up along the side and back of the Kane County Circuit Clerk building. Some vans and SUVs contain TVs and monitors that seem to be peeking out over the window ledge. A friendly, clipboard-equipped greeter promotes an air of subdued festivity. This is the monthly Kane County Electronics and Books Recycling drive. We at the Sierra Club already understand the value of this undertaking, but many of us still wonder what really happens to all those retired microwaves and printers once the team members unload them from our trunks and hatchbacks.

Gary Mielke, Kane County Recycling Coordinator, spearheads the operation started in 2001, and determines the fate of all these devices. His mission is largely to reduce the volume and toxicity of landfill materials. An ongoing challenge Mielke faces is how to maintain public interest in recycling.

A majority of this spent equipment is, not surprisingly, televisions and computer components. Electronics go to two different recycling contractors that de-manufacture everything down to basic materials. There is a per-pound charge for certain amounts of items including TVs, monitors, and batteries. Other items, including towers, printers, telephones, and a limited amount of TVs and monitors, are carted away at no charge. The two recyclers represent two different paths the equipment may take.

In the first path, taken by the larger portion of discards, equipment is sorted and inspected. Small functioning monitors are resold, and everything else is disassembled by hand and sorted into categories. Cabling goes into machines that grind off insulation so that the

metal can be salvaged. Glass parts from CRT devices are recycled, as are plastic and metal pieces. Printed circuit boards are sold to smelters who melt them down to separate materials.

The second path sends TVs, monitors, towers, and the like into shredding machines that reduce the devices to small bits. A second type of machine then sorts the shreds into metals, glass, and plastics, where they move on to find a new purpose.

Mielke stresses the importance of downstream accountability by recipients of these materials. This not only concerns whether the materials continue to follow an ecologically friendly path, but whether the materials are demanufactured and handled in humane work conditions. In some cases, plastics may end up overseas. Recycling contractors must provide disclosures regarding their own processes as well as the processes of the recipients of their output.

The Kane Country program is aligned with an increasingly aggressive policy by the State of Illinois to better manage solid waste. Current state law requires that each county must have a solid waste landfill reduction plan. A new Illinois law will take effect in 2012 that bans any electronics from landfills. Mielke says this will likely change the way we as residents dispose of our electronics, and involve the waste disposal services that haul away our curbside garbage every week.

Mielke's office collects data for performance tracking and analysis. Some factoids from 2008:

- 8,700 vehicles made drop-offs
- the average participant left 108 pounds of equipment
- 110,000 pieces of media (CDs, videotapes,



Gary Mielke (and a deconstructed LCD monitor)

- 3.5 floppies) were dropped off
- 72 consoles were dropped off
- 900,000 lbs of electronics were hauled off by 41 semi trailers, at a cost of \$41,000

For more information about the Kane County recycling program, go to www.co.kane.il.us/Environment/recycle/electronic.htm. Here are some final thoughts:

- Books are welcome, but please recycle as much as you can through curbside service or see if a library will accept them.
- The program cannot recycle 5-1/4 floppy disks
- Please remove the paper boxes from VHS tapes
- Volunteers for the drop dates are welcome
- Please help spread the word about this important service!

Tracking Footprints in Subzero Snow No Small Feat

We probably didn't even make it through a full hour before seeking the warmth of the Tekakwitha Woods Nature Center, but a small, hardy group of VOF members did venture out on a -4 degree Saturday morning to find animal tracks in the snow. Led by naturalist Valerie Blaine and outdoorsman Mark Romano, the group found abundant trails in relatively fresh snow. Snow and track conditions were nearly ideal; we found evidence from deer, fox, mice, least weasels, squirrels, rabbits, and other critters.

The hike was a follow-up to a presentation given two weeks earlier by Blaine and Romano at the VOF January general membership meeting.



Tracking wildlife at Tekakwitha Woods.



A Cedar Waxwing passing through North Aurora

park, community center, coffee shop or bar where people create and celebrate community.

A “neighborhood” is typically comprised of about 500 people, living in 150-180 homes, and has a key characteristic: it offers opportunities for privacy and community. Another design tool is a “mini-neighborhood.” In new urbanism this might be a “living court” of 12-14 homes which front on a common green-outdoor living room with a defined entrance, two benches at right angles and no cars because garage access is from an alley behind the houses. It’s a place where children can play safely and neighbors can congregate easily. Several living courts and their companion

motor courts combine to make up a neighborhood. You can visit such a place: “Home Town” in Aurora, off Montgomery Road, east of Farnsworth Avenue.

New Urbanism places a premium on human scale with a metric being a five-minute walk which equals a quarter mile or 1320 feet. Think of a football field: 100 yards equals 300 feet plus two end zones, which is another 60 feet. If you walk from one end zone to the other four times (360 x 4), you have walked a quarter mile. Suppose you could live in such a walkable place where you could work, play, worship, buy, sell and serve. Making those places happen is what New Urbanism is all about.

Here are some things you can do immediately.

- Embrace higher density
- Demand a mix of uses, i.e. residential over retail
- Adopt “Form-based Codes” that define what we want
- Eliminate one-way streets
- Lobby seriously for real increases in federal funding for mass transit
- Give up NIMBY and embrace community
- Never allow another strip mall, unless it has two stories of residential space above it
- Get serious about walk-ability
- Give up half of your eight parking spaces, yes, eight. Count them as you go about your day.

So, You Think You Can Read a Label...

Deciphering environmental claims on the labels in today’s marketplace is an art, not a science. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) Environmental Guides explain to marketers how consumers are likely to interpret environmental marketing claims so they can avoid making false or misleading claims. With manufacturers increasingly making “green” claims, this has become a whole new area. The basic rule is, the consumer must be able to figure out what the label means. This article is based on the FTC staff’s view of the law.

All marketers making claims about their product, package or service must have substantiation, that is, a reasonable basis for their claims. When it comes to environmental claims, a reasonable basis often may require competent and reliable scientific evidence. An environmental claim should specify whether it refers to the product, the packaging, or both, or just to a component of the product or its packaging.

Ready to read labels? Here’s an easy one. A box of cereal is labeled (without further explanation) “recycled package.” The packaging consists of a paperboard box with a waxed paper bag inside holding the cereal. Deceptive or not? Obviously the cereal is not recycled, but is it the paperboard box (about 75% of the package weight) or the waxed paper bag (about 25%) or both? Deceptive.

A little harder one. A paperboard box of plastic cups says “Recycled” prominently on the front panel. In small type on the back of the box is the statement “This carton contains 100% recycled fiber.” Deceptive or not? Well, the language adequately qualifies the claim, but it’s too small and too far away from the main claim for customers to notice it at the point of buying. Customers might easily think “recycled” refers to the cups, not the carton. Deceptive.

A greeting card seller declares on its web site that its greeting cards now contain “50% more recycled content than before.” Sounds great but, in fact, the recycled content has gone from 2 to 3%. Technically correct, but that tiny recycled content was almost a waste of time in the first place. Deceptive.

A cloth shopping bag is labeled “eco-friendly.” Deceptive or not? This is one of those phrases that means nothing in itself. If there is no other explanation, it’s deceptive. If it were followed by a phrase

such as “This cloth bag is reusable and is made from 100% recycled fibers,” it would not be deceptive.

A detergent bottle is labeled “50% more recycled content.” Well, 50% more than what? This is deceptive. To fix it, you need something like “50% more recycled content than our previous package.” Even that might not tell you anything, if their previous package contained 2% recycled content.

How about “environmentally safe.” This has a host of what-if’s. Environmentally safe for whom? Animals, fungi, people, bacteria? What is “safe?” Safer than dynamite? We need some specific claims about this statement.

Likewise, “environmentally preferable” is even more deceptive. How is it preferable? It could be environmentally preferable to dynamite. How about some language like “This product has no air polluting potential and is 100% biodegradable.”

Speaking of “biodegradable,” this is a broad term that needs lots of definition. Pretty much everything is biodegradable, if you wait long enough. Biodegradable should mean biodegradable in our lifetimes, and probably should mean in 5 years or less. Modern landfills are designed, by law, to exclude water, air and sunlight, so your average newspaper or carrot shows no signs of biodegrading in a landfill in 50 years. Claiming anything that is normally sent to a landfill as “biodegradable” is deceptive.

“Photodegradable” means the part will, if exposed to enough sunlight, break up into little pieces. From a litter-picker’s point of view, that means that instead of handling 10 large pieces of litter, you’ll have to deal with 100 or 1,000 small pieces. There just aren’t any products on the market that are truly “photodegradable,” so this label is almost always deceptive.

Try this. A pressed pulp planter that contains a dogwood tree is labeled “biodegradable.” Deceptive or not? Well, once the planter and tree are planted in the ground, the planter quickly disintegrates and biodegrades, allowing the roots of the dogwood tree to reach out to the surrounding earth. Not deceptive. Why does the planter biodegrade when you plant it in your yard and not in a landfill? Good question. In the ground, it has water, air, bacteria and sunlight to do the job.

A biggie is “Recyclable.” A “recyclable” claim on your SUV should be a tip-off. Who recycles a whole SUV? The claim should specifically refer to the part that is recyclable, such as “The small ornament on your rear seat assembly is made of 100% recyclable fiber content, provided you can remove it and get it into an approved recycling program in your city.”

“Recyclable” doesn’t mean you can drop it in your recycle bag at the curb and it’ll get recycled. In many cases, recycling programs for the particular plastic or object are just not available in your area. Even if recycling programs are available in the 20 major metropolitan areas of the country, if you live in East Overshoe, Idaho, they’re not going to recycle it. Phrases like “Recyclable where programs exist” are not adequate, because it’s not your job to know where recycle facilities exist, it’s theirs.

In short, the unqualified term “recyclable” is almost always deceptive. You should be able to determine from the label whether there is a shot at this thing being recycled in your area.

“Please Recycle” is even further out. Consumers interpret this phrase to mean the product or package is recyclable, and is recycled in their area. Couldn’t be further from the truth. Many packages are made of composite materials, that is, a tightly bonded mixture of paper fibers and plastic and, often, different types of plastic in the same container (toothpaste tubes are a good example). Even where there are major recycling centers, they don’t handle these things, because the components are just too hard to separate. Unless there are specifics about who recycles and where, this term is deceptive.

“Recycled Content” is another catch-all that is typically deceptive. First, there is the question of pre-consumer or post-consumer. What are we recycling here, stuff that has never left the factory, just been reworked, or are we talking stuff that has been to the consumer, used, and returned for recycling? Then, what’s the percentage recycled? A paperboard tray overwrapped with a printed plastic cover can have recycled material. But even if the plastic cover is 50% recycled, it only amounts to 5% of the weight of the packaging, and 2.5% of the recycled material in the package. The consumer should know where the — continued on next page

VOF Calendar of Events

For more information about outings and hikes, see the Outings section of the *Lake & Prairie* and also the VOF web site.

All meetings are held at the Batavia Public Library at 7 p.m. the 2nd Monday of each month except July, August and Dec. The public is invited to attend.

April 13 (Monday) -

General membership meeting. Illinois Chapter Chair Jack Darin will join us and give an update on state-level happenings.

April 25 (Saturday) EARTH DAY -

Mark your calendars now to help April 25 in the morning. We'll do a river clean-up along the bike trail (more details later). Tell your friends and bring a group. Sierra Club is also promoting "Take Back Drugs" April 25. Bring old medications to turn in. The medications will be properly disposed. We are trying to educate the public to not dispose of medications into the sewage system.

May 11 (Monday) -

General membership meeting. Terri Voitik provides an overview on gasification and its importance in the quest for renewable energy sources.

June 8 (Monday) -

Marlene Bedard will introduce us to GMOs (genetically modified organisms) and the controversy surrounding their appearance on our dinner tables.

September 12 (Saturday) -

Save this date for the Paddleboat Fundraiser River Cruise. Details to follow.

VOF Leadership

Charlie Zine	Chair
Nate Stelton	Vice Chair/E-Mail/Database
Julie Koivula	Secretary/Outings
Ron Bedard	Treasurer/Clean Air & Water

Additional ExCom Members

Terri Voitik	Executive Committeeman
Jan Mangers	Executive Committeeman
Tery Murray	Executive Committeeman
Fran Caffee	IL Chapter Water Sentinels Chair
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Craig Zabel	Publicity/Global Warming/Sprawl

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Dudley Case	Executive Consultant
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Ted Penesis	PaddleBoat Fund Raiser

Newsletter

Nate Stelton	Editor
Barb Vrchota and Fran Caffee	Editorial Consultants
Lisanne Freese	Layout and Design

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21st Century Fox is published quarterly by the Valley of the Fox Group of the Sierra Club. Send submissions and letters to the editor at vf-news@illinois.sierraclub.org. Please include your full name, address and, for letters to the editor, title and page number of story. Deadline for the next issue is May 15, 2009.

Go Paperless

You can now unsubscribe from the paper version of the Illinois Chapter's *Lake & Prairie* (which includes *21st Century Fox*), and instead receive an e-mailed announcement and link to download the new *Lake & Prairie* from the chapter website (www.illinois.sierraclub.org). To do this, send your request, name, membership number (the 8-digit number on the address label of your *Sierra* magazine), and e-mail address to: editor@illinois.sierraclub.org.

You can also sign up to receive *Sierra Club Insider*, the flagship e-newsletter. Sent out twice a month, it features the Club's latest news and activities. Subscribe and view recent editions at www.sierraclub.org/insider

Outings Leader Opportunities

If anyone is interested in becoming a National or Local outings leader, following is a list of upcoming training classes. To be a leader you must be a Sierra Club member 18 years of age or older. For local leading, you need to take Outings Leader Training 101 (which you can do online) and first-aid. For National, you need 101 and 201 training and wilderness first-aid. You can check these out at the National sites or e-mail Julie Koivula (VOF Outings Chair and National Leader, at julie.akoivula@sbcglobal.net).

Wilderness First Responder (WFR) and WFR-Recertification courses at Clair Tappaan Lodge (a Sierra Club-owned facility) The WFR-R course runs May 1-3 and the course fee of \$325 includes food, lodging and instruction (no CPR). The WFR course runs

May 16-25 and the course fee of \$725 includes food, lodging and instruction. To learn more and to register, go to www.sierraclub.org/outings/training/upcoming.asp.

First Aid Course Reimbursement for WFR and WFR-R courses at Clair Tappaan Lodge. The full course cost (including instruction, food and lodging) is reimbursable! To be eligible for reimbursement, a leader must be a current Sierra Club member and staffing a trip in the current year or scheduled to staff a trip in the following year.

Outings Leader Training Workshops

April in Ohio (location/date TBD). June 5-7 at Clair Tappaan Lodge. We hope to run one more in the fall of 2009. To learn more and to register, please visit the SC link shown above.

Labels — continued from previous page

recycle is, and how much of the whole packaging it amounts to.

"Refillable" can mean many things. Does the marketer collect and refill the packages? Does he sell a refill kit for you to use and refill your package?

Okay, a hand soap bottle with hand pump is marked "refillable" and next to it on the shelf is a larger concentrated refill package with no pump. Not deceptive. But further over, a gallon spring water jug marked refillable has no refill station — you refill it at your tap! Deceptive. The label should not leave it up to you to find ways to refill it.

The term "Reusable" is not defined by the FTC. As long as the consumer can find a way to reuse the item, this label is not deceptive. Though it may not be very descriptive, either.

"Ozone Safe" and "Ozone Friendly" claims mean that neither the product nor its packaging harms the atmosphere by contributing to the depletion of upper atmospheric ozone or the formation of ground level ozone. CFCs (chlorofluorocarbons) can deplete upper atmospheric ozone. So your foam plastic tableware is marked "contains no CFCs." Clear enough, what? However, the manufacture of the tableware uses HCFC-22, another ozone depleting chemical. The flatware doesn't contain any CFCs at the point of sale, and the label implies that the product does not harm the ozone layer. Deceptive.

A nasal inhalant is labeled "95% less damaging to the ozone layer than past formulations that contained CFCs." The manufacturer has the evidence to show that it is. This is the kind of information the consumer needs to make an informed decision. Not deceptive.

However, watch for the claim on a product that contains no CFCs but contains volatile organic compounds (VOCs), such as alcohols or butane and propane propellants (and others). These VOCs react in sunlight to form ground level ozone and harm the environment. Household cleaning products, floor polishes, charcoal lighter fluid, windshield washer fluid and hair styling sprays often contain VOCs. Here, claims of "ozone friendly" or "ozone safe" are deceptive.

Many marketers are honestly trying to tell an accurate environmental story to consumers, but just as many are trying to simply cash in on being "green." Packages don't typically have a lot of room for claims, so part of the information gets cut, leaving half-truths. Marketers rely on consumer reaction at the point of sale to buy now and question later (later meaning never). When you get your purchases home, read the labels. When you're on the internet, type in the web site and spend 60 seconds finding out a little more about the product or packaging.

For more information and examples, visit www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/pubs/buspubs/greenguides.shtm.