Shaping Healthy Communities

Transect Zones, Health Factor Groups and Case Studies
NATIONAL INITIATIVES

• CDC – Healthy Communities Program

• HUD, DOT, EPA – Sustainable Communities Initiative

• APA – “Planning and Community Health” Research Initiative

• AIA – in 2012 launched “Decade of Design”

• ULI – In 2013 launched “Building Healthy Places Initiative”

• ASLA – “Health Benefits of Nature”
DESIGNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR HEALTH
Whole-Community Wellness Lecture Series

A healthy community is one that continuously creates and improves both its physical and social environments, helping people to support one another in aspects of daily life and to develop to their fullest potential.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Service

The Nashville Civic Design Center (NCDC), in collaboration with the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, College of Architecture and Design, is pleased to present the Lecture Series, "Designing Environments for Health," exploring how the built environment influences physical, mental, emotional, and social health. The
ISSUES / SIGNIFICANCE

BRFSS, 1990, 2000, 2010
(*BMI ≥30, or about 30 lbs. overweight for 5’4” person)

1990

2000

2010

Legend:
- No Data
- <10%
- 10%–14%
- 15%–19%
- 20%–24%
- 25%–29%
- ≥30%
Phases of Project and Timeline

Research

Synthesis

Action Planning

Writing and Editing

Rollout and Implementation

May 2011

Shaping Healthy Communities

Early 2014
Built Environment & Health Factor Groups

- Neighborhood Design & Development
- Transportation
- Walkability & Pedestrian Safety
- Food Resources
- Housing
- Open Space & Parks
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Herbs For Sale

Sm. Herbs $3.50

Lg. Herbs Ind. Priced

Veg. Plants $2.95
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Natural
Rural
District
For environmental consultant and Scarsdale resident Barry Sulkin, 28, rural living is “not an original model for healthy living.” He contrasts “people jogging down West End Avenue, breathing fumes” with “hiking in the woods.” Sulkin also points to the physical activity inherent in country life. “You cut firewood instead of lifting weights.”

Food acquisition is a combination of trip to grocery store outside the community—”We don’t grow our own produce here,” Sulkin says—and the real green and fresh. “For me, it’s not as big a deal. Once I leave my driveway (it takes about 10 or 15 minutes), probably quicker than in many parts of town, with all the traffic. Most people out here that have a job in town, we do it on their way.”

Sulkin’s vegetables come from Bella Bresa Neighborhood Farm, a cooperative of four properties located in a cornfield around south of the Ashland City Highway and south of Scarlett, south of the Corporate Highway and north of the Ashland City Highway. The farm is a member of the Cooperative Developmental Alliance with 120 members, plus one to seven farmers and restaurants. “The farm also has a pick-up and plan to add cows next. There’s a chicken operation down in Bella Bresa where I get eggs,” he says. “Food is a major focus, an intentional effort by us to show the land is used as it should be.” Sulkin adds that “I was encouraged development pressures.”

Sulkin notes that “we have a lot of property here for commercial use, so we have to work very closely with the city to keep it green, and people miss the concept that we live in the country, not in it. We’ve been working on that for the past 30 years. Now that the market is growing, we’re really pushing for conservation.”

The center of controversy was the landfill threat. “There’s a landfill proposal for a site across the road in the area.” Sulkin predicts that “we’re going to stay together (think forever). We’ve seen what happens when you don’t.”

What happened was the widening of Route 12, the Ashland City Highway to Southbridge/Bella Bresa. “The road was two lanes and dangerous,” Sulkin admits. “It needed to be improved, but the highway agency got carried away. The original design was a 4-lane with a median, two lanes in each direction and then lanes on a 300-course.” When a few property owners complained that the median would prevent exiting directly to the driveway, however, the engineers “just moved everything” he explains. “They made a road that had a median, double lanes, and green lights” — features of urban and suburban, but not rural roads.” 2001 official told me it was built that way to encourage development, so they didn’t have to come back later and add curbs and gutters as commercial and residential development grew,” Sulkin says. “It’s not what we’ve planned out here.” The 2001 guy said, “Well, that’s just what we do.” So the people building the road had no concept of the community’s plan, as thought of what the road would be like. “We’re not.”

What the widened road delivered was more traffic and “developers fighting around here,” Sulkin says. “They didn’t get ahead of the road game.” We’re trying to stay ahead of the snowman game because snowmen are the key to controlling growth. Once you put a sewer out here for one parcel, it’s all over. You can’t close other people from parking here, just like a road. Abandoning of keeping the community open is “trying to look at the city, the Village, the state and the Planning Board, to pursue what we call agriculture zoning, which is done in other parts of the country, and a sewer cart Honduras,” he says. “We need the city to embrace what’s being done out here, not just see us as the next road to put something.”
2

STRATEGIES

- Strengthen the civic heart of rural communities.
- Encourage transportation alternatives to single occupancy automobile trips.
- Create a safe network of pedestrian and bicycle paths connecting community resources.
- Preserve and promote rural areas as sources for local food.
- Incorporate a diversity of housing options to conserve rural areas and existing open space.
- Create additional opportunities to connect regional parks and open spaces to surrounding communities.
RURAL

COUNTRY LIVING

The pastoral tradition, which celebrates the agrarian ethos as free from the complexities and constraints of city life, has had a long run in Western civilization. The ancient Greeks and Romans extolled the virtues of an idealized Arcadia, a theme that flowed outward from the Mediterranean basin during the Renaissance as the study of classical texts spread north to Europe and the British Isles.

When industrialization commenced in 18th century England, intellectuals placed renewed emphasis on the spiritual values and independence of the rural life. In his 1802 "Parables to Lucian Ballads," British poet William Wordsworth explained that he wrote of the rural landscape because there the "essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity."

This is the romantic philosophy, which dominated Western thought when the United States became a nation. And the contention that a human being is at his or her best when closest to nature has been a strong current in our culture ever since. Thoreau and Jefferson, in his big house on his little mountain, or Henry David Thoreau in his cabin by Walden Pond.

Today opportunities for rural living are much more convincing than they were for Jefferson or Thoreau. There are, however, pockets of space in Davidson County where open fields, forests, and free-flowing streams still hold sway. And a renewed interest in small-scale farming, local food sources, and open space preservation for environmental and recreational reasons has heightened the desire to keep these pockets rural.

Residents of these rural areas don't scorn the city. After all, many of them are dependent on the more populated portions of the county for employment, schooling for their children, and for goods and services. They merely prefer to live closer to nature than to neighbors and are willing to forgo the conveniences and develop self-sufficiency necessary to do so.

RURAL ZONE BASICS

For planning purposes, rural transit zones exhibit the following characteristics:

- Sparsely developed.
- Primary land use is agriculture and low-density residential.
- Limited commercial.
- Wide spaces between buildings, except for residential developments.
- Minimal landscaping and limited sensor and street lighting.
- Roads typically two-lane with few intersections.
- Low pedestrian and bike connectivity: few roads, sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, or bicycle paths.
- Minimal city services: many knowing only on roads and exurban ecosystems.

In 2012, the U.S. Census Bureau identified 112,429 acres in Davidson County —25 percent of the total land area—as rural land, with a population of approximately 21,000 residents. But rural America is declining. The country lost over 40 farms totaling 5,086 acres between 2002 and 2007, the most recent year of the Census of Agriculture. "We have lost a considerable amount of farm and open space since then," says Audrey Ladd of the Land Trust for Davidson County, an organization that works to preserve the county's rural and historic landscapes. "But there is no reliable quantification of this loss."

SHAPING HEALTH IN THE RURAL TRANSIT ZONE

ANALYSIS AND STRATEGIES

In 2011, Mayor Karl Dean released the city's first open-space plan. The plan aims to protect 20,000 acres over the next 25 years, including 10,000 acres of floodplain. Much of the focus of the preservation plan, logically enough, falls on areas within the rural transit zone, particularly on floodplains and land in the vicinity of the Cumberland River.

In encouraging the health positives and mitigating the negatives of rural areas, therefore, planners, developers, and residents should consider strategies that preserve the rural, open character. Development options to meet the needs of residents—needs such as food resources, senior housing and economic opportunities within the community—should be appropriately scaled and devised to not preclude future development. Strategies should be consistent with the fiscal limitations of government's public service provision to low-population-density. Freight/MTA bus service, pocket parks, community recreation centers and paved sidewalks, for example, are financially unrealistic. Infrastructure appropriate for higher population-density communities, such as curvilinear roads, street lighting and sewers, should be avoided.
PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

Benefits of Rurality

With the exception of the rural zone’s regional parks, which are accessible primarily by private vehicle, open space in rural areas is primarily held. This accessibility of undeveloped rural land should not be considered a substitute for public open space.

Strategies to Maintain Open Space

Some property owners in rural areas have placed conservation easements on their acreage through the Land Trust for Tennessee. Such easements keep private land undeveloped in perpetuity while providing tax benefits to owners. The land for preserving open space should be vigorously pursued in the zone’s rural transition zone.

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Rural public parks are not only beneficial for local residents, but are assets for the entire community. According to the Smart Growth America, the potential of rural parks to lure more urban dwellers “out to the country” should not be overlooked. Such parks can generate livelihoods, reinvigorate and develop their inner outdoor tourism. Rural parks can thus contribute to efforts to preserve these ‘transit zones’ or open spaces.

These are also key physical features of rural communities and play a vital role in the “bumps and humps of life’s path” in improving the quality of air and water quality and mitigating the heat island effect of more developed areas. The Metro Tree Canopy Assessment reports on the existing tree coverage and identifies potential areas in Tennessee to increase the. The county’s rural and natural ‘green’ zones would be expected to have the most extensive tree canopy, with areas reaching over 60 percent coverage.

Increased development in the most fragrant rural areas could offer benefits to the county as a whole in the abbreviation of pollutants, carbon sequestration and regulation of water runoff. Large-scale tree planting by Metro government in rural areas, however, is not feasible on an unprecedented scale. Incentives for tree planting by landowners of rural property must be more feasible.

Every Child Outdoors

“Nature deficit disorder” has been coined by Richard Louv who writes about the connection between family, nature and community in Last Child in the Woods. Louv brought national attention to thinking that childhood in modern society is seriously impaired by lack of contact with nature.

By 2018, Louv’s Children and Nature Network found that children were spending an average of 3 hours per day in front of electronic screens, compared with 30 minutes a day of unstructured time outdoors. This disparity has led to serious physical and mental health problems. The research suggests that time spent outdoors has raised significant questions and health issues, including weight loss, attention deficit disorder and depression. Emerging research reveals that, in addition to reducing the risks associated with not spending time outdoors, the positive impacts of spending time in nature may have significantly greater impacts on a child’s physical, cognitive and social development and health.

This research and information has sparked a worldwide movement to introduce more links to the wonders of nature through various planned and spontaneous activities.

In response to these statistics, Warner Park Nature Center has been credited in the TN Parks Child and Nature Coalition, promoting opportunities and experiences that connect children, as well as parents and teachers, with the outdoors. The installation of Non-Natural Play areas is a part of this effort. The integration of preserve and play during the play areas and other preserved areas provide a safe haven for children to explore natural areas while experiencing the wonders of the natural world.

“Every Child Outdoors”

Richie Louv, Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder (2008)
CASE STUDIES

SCOTTSBORO/BELLS BEND AND NEELY’S BEND

Decomposition of rural areas have agricultural and small-town residential land uses. Individual local communities, however, vary in their socio-economic conditions and available resources. The case studies on Scottsboro/Bells Bend and Neely’s Bend illustrate how these distinctions among rural communities require different strategies to improve the health of residents.

The communities of Scottsboro/Bells Bend and Neely’s Bend are rural areas within the urbanized area of the city of Nashville. These areas were once served by rural public transportation, but are now at the crossroads of development. Both are relatively undeveloped states in their lack of accessibility and infrastructure. These lack has historically been determined by geographic and demographic factors. Bells Bend and Neely’s Bend are held as models for development in rural areas that have been historically disadvantaged by geographic, racial, and economic factors.

The health of the residents in Scottsboro/Bells Bend and Neely’s Bend, whether urban or rural, has always been determined by the construction of schools, roads, and utility services. Community residents who make up the population of rural areas have come to realize that such infrastructure would enable the evaluation of what they need to conserve.

While similar in many physical characteristics, Scottsboro/Bells Bend and Neely’s Bend differ significantly in their demographics. These demographic disparities suggest other distinctions between these communities. For example, only a few people in Neely’s Bend live in poverty, while more than 50% of monthly income is spent for food in rural areas; and there is a low percentage of vacant housing. In Neely’s Bend, on the other hand, almost two percent of the occupied households are burdened by housing costs.
NICKY’S BEND

A slice down the middle, you find Nicky’s Bend. Nicky’s Bend Road is a country backroad through the history of Nashville development. You start at Beargrass Pike, where most of the cars and riders of by-gones and extra stop, with their cassette of upgraded, rally ready to the great view that lies one of Nashville’s hilly areas. Heading south into the bend, you pass by 1950s and 60s buildings, mixed with older still focusing—the kind with names like “Cardboard” and “Cathedral.” The occasional views of the 19th century—large houses on square lawns such as the Haire Farmstead (1874) and the Four Roses (1860)—readies the time when all of the land was farmland. This past the cluster of Nicky’s Bend elementary and middle schools, with its new in-age, then panoramic view. The road terminus at “Hickory Inn.”

Nicky’s Bend is named for Alonzo Nicky, who arrived in 1778 with the group of settlers led by James Robertson. They established Fort Nashborough near where the Main Cumberland River stands for protection against the Native Americans, who had traditionally used the land for hunting and trapping and reserved encroachment by white settlers. Nicky and his family settled on a deep bend in the Cumberland River to the west of the fort, where cattle could be tended by the surrounding farmers. A spring and salt lick—originally called Nicky’s Land and later Lakeside Sulphur Spill—attracted game; the salt was also used for game feed. But they were exposed to long and open land. William Nicky was killed by Native Americans in the following year.

Nicky’s Bend was once, as Scottsboro tells it, a rural community of land, farms, and the intersection of Nicky’s Bend Road and Cheatham Blvd. While the community has grown, Nicky’s Bend is as rural today as it was in the 19th century, it is served by Nicky’s Bend School and Nicky’s Bend is recognized for having the potential to become the future residential center for Nicky’s Bend.

Only a few commercial stores are currently found in Nicky’s Bend, and most of the businesses are small and scattered around the area. Nicky’s Bend is a small community of small businesses, with a few number of cars and trucks.

The Nicky’s Bend Pharmacy and Middle School occupy separate stances of the Nicky’s Bend community. Nicky’s Bend and Cheatham Blvd are connected by several streets in the community, and there are more heavily populated areas in the eastern part of the town. Nicky’s Bend has a rich history of farming and agriculture, which contributed here.

The Nicky’s Bend community is located at the confluence of the Cumberland River and Cheatham Blvd, which is a small community of small businesses, with a few number of cars and trucks.

Right: Nicky’s Bend Park is the scene of the development of the Cumberland River, the eastern and Cheatham Blvd. Nicky’s Bend is a small community of small businesses, with a few number of cars and trucks.

Left: The land development of the Nicky’s Bend village and the intersection of Nicky’s Bend Road and Cheatham Blvd. While the community has grown, Nicky’s Bend is as rural today as it was in the 19th century, it is served by Nicky’s Bend School and Nicky’s Bend is recognized for having the potential to become the future residential center for Nicky’s Bend.
NATIONAL RECOGNITION
Nashville in 2040 is Sustainable because...

- More outdoor events to help people stay active & Healthy
The five stages of NashvilleNext

Community Input & Speaker Series
Fall 2012 - Summer 2013

Creating the Vision
Summer 2013 - Fall 2013

Mapping Future Growth & Preservation
Fall 2013 - Spring 2014

Making Policy Decisions
Spring 2014 - Fall 2014

Creating and Adopting the Plan
Fall 2014 - Summer 2015
“The shape we give our city in turn shapes us.”

Nashville Civic Design Center
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