

8th Lecture

**distinctive, attractive
communities with a
strong sense of place**

Prepared by:

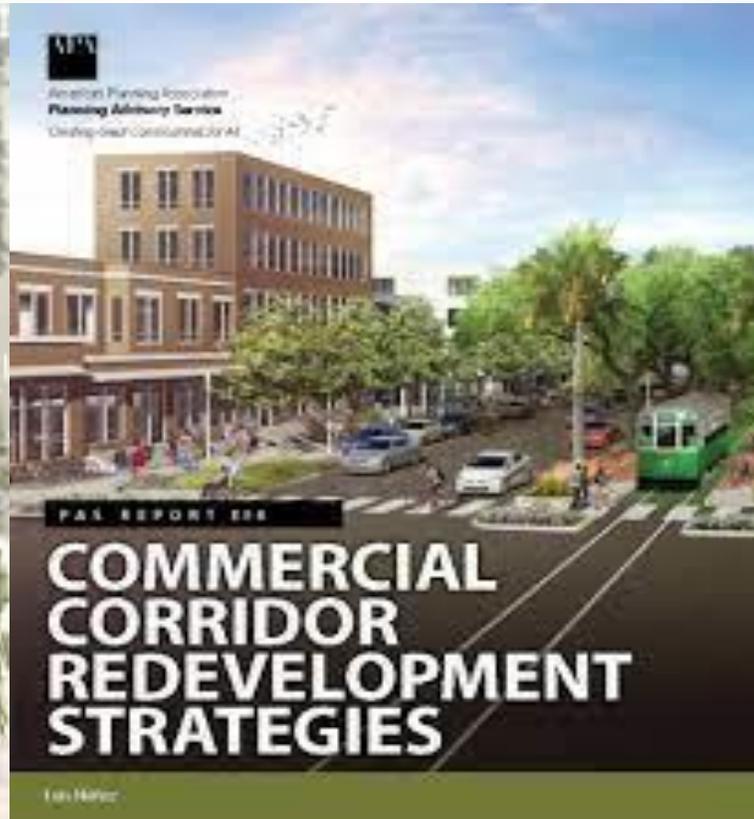
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Introduction

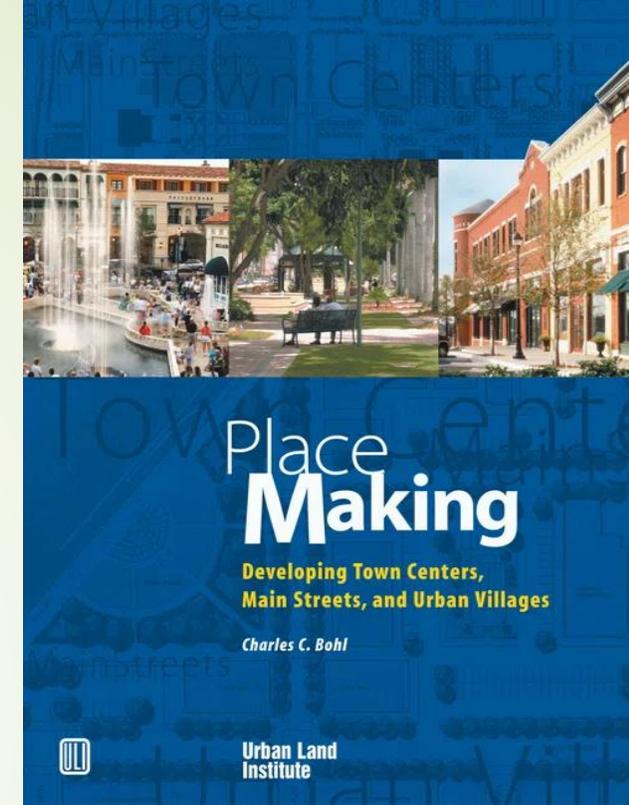
- Demand is growing for town centers, commercial corridors, public plazas, and transit villages that create a sense of place and establish a unique identity for a community.



- ▶ A **transit village** is a pedestrian-friendly mixed-use district or neighborhood oriented around the station of a high-quality transit system, such as rail or bus rail transit. B.R.T.
- ▶ Often a civic square of public space borders the train station, functioning as the hub or centerpiece of the surrounding community and encouraging social interaction.



- **Charles Bohl*** noted in his book (2002)
- **Placemaking:** *Developing Town Centers, Main Streets, and Urban Villages*
- that approximately 100 new town center projects are planned or under construction and more than 6,000 main street and downtown revitalization projects are under way throughout the country.
- **Developers and builders are finding that tenants and homebuyers are** willing to pay a premium to live in a neighborhood that is:
 - **attractive**
 - **pedestrian-oriented**
 - that creates a **sense of community.**



How can a community become “distinctive” and “attractive”?

- Being distinctive and attractive isn't just about beautification.
- **A distinctive community** is special for identifiable reasons and distinguishable from surrounding communities in clear and obvious ways.
- **An attractive community** doesn't just look good, but also is capable of inviting and entertaining visitors.
- Beautification has its place, but this principle should encourage the community to think about **more than just aesthetics**.
- Becoming a **distinctive and attractive community** is about deciding **what kind of place you want to be** and how you can **build a more exciting and enriching place** to live or to visit.

What does “sense of place” mean?

- **“Sense of place”** is a phrase often used to distinguish those places that have a unique character rooted in both **the local culture and natural environment.**
- The Neshoba County Fairgrounds,
- the Oxford Courthouse Square
- the Natchez Historic District are just a few examples of Mississippi places that most people would consider to have a strong sense of place.
- While these examples are partially valued for **their rich history,**
- we can also build new places that have a strong sense of place by **designing in performance with our local climate, environment and culture.**

Historic Natchez Mississippi
The Darby Fudge Factory is one of many interesting shops in the downtown historic district.



Oxford, Mississippi's Square Books Jr. provides an inviting and unusual streetscape.



Aberdeen, Mississippi's historic Elkin Theatre provides a unique experience in a town that is distant from many entertainment options. The Elkin Theatre is run by a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving the historic building and providing the community with additional entertainment for local kids, teenagers and parents.

How can we avoid “placelessness?”

- One of the most difficult challenges any contemporary community faces is how to attract development while avoiding the weak sameness of automobile-oriented chain stores, Big box retailers and fast food restaurants.
- It takes considerable will and dedication for a community to overcome the momentum built up over the past fifty years of suburban development.
- While there are no easy answers, there are plenty of actions that communities can take to turn things in the right direction.



automobile-oriented chain stores



Importance of the principle

- Communities with a strong **sense of place** build on their unique history, identity and assets to foster
- **community pride,**
- increase **social interaction**
- and **market their community** to potential businesses and residents.
- The results can improve economic stability,
- increase property values
- and greatly impact the lives and memories of residents.



Bright colors, tightly spaced cabins and political promotions are all part of the unique character of the Neshoba County Fairgrounds which is held each summer in Neshoba County, Mississippi.

Means of creating attractive, distinctive places

- ▶ towns and cities are looking to **develop more of the types of places** that their residents **can take pride in** –
- ▶ **the shopping districts and plazas** where residents bring out-of-town visitors and frequent on the weekends,
- ▶ **well-designed, pedestrian-oriented gathering places** that focus on historical, cultural or natural attributes – while creating opportunities to follow a range of activities in a small area.
- ▶ **Many existing communities have such features**, and **new developments** can be designed to create central gathering places and areas of civic pride.
- ▶ **By preserving and maintaining** the buildings and natural environments that make our communities unique,
- ▶ we are **creating places of permanent value** that serve as focal points for the current community and future generations.
- ▶ Historically, **the public and private sectors** have each played a critical role in creating attractive and memorable places.

Elements of sense of place

- ▶ five elements that help establish a community's unique sense of place are as follows:
- ▶ **1. Natural Features and Systems**
- ▶ In a sense, every city is simply an extension of the natural landscape upon which it is sited.
- ▶ This landscape is composed of watersheds, aquifers, and geologic formations and may be part of a rich rain forest or an arid desert.
- ▶ Consideration of the natural setting is essential in every decision a community makes about how it should build.

- ❖ In some cases, the natural setting is basically linked to an area's community character and in fact defines a key aspect of its economic vitality.
- ❖ In other cases, the protection of natural resources comes out of a planning process that identifies a range of assets that need to be protected or restored.

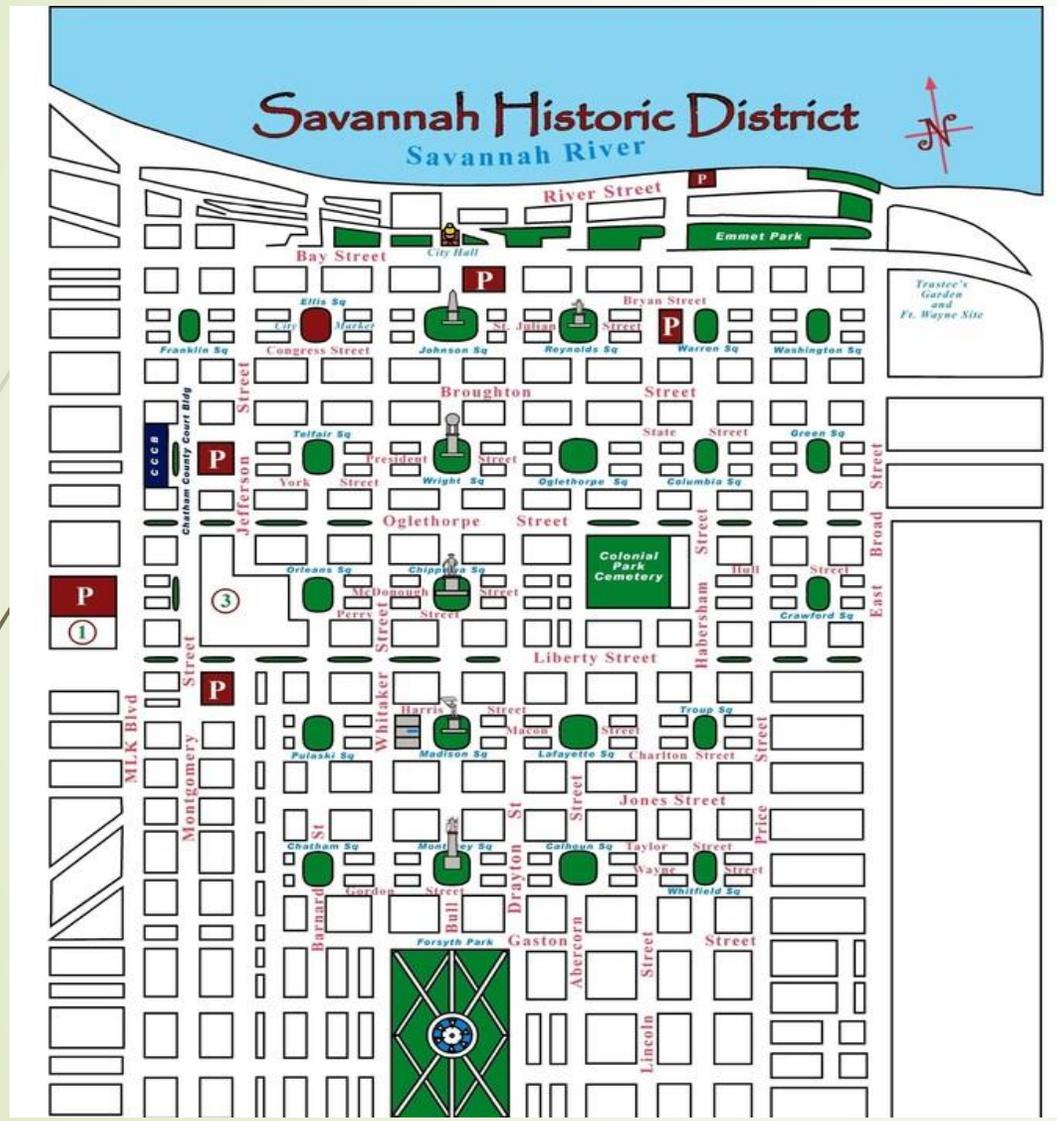


Vail, in the Rocky Mountains of **Colorado**

2. The Public Domain(area)

- In terms of a place's physical elements,
- it is through streets, sidewalks, and public spaces that public officials have the greatest opportunity to directly create and conserve the cityscape in a manner that contributes to a community's overall quality of life.
- . A case in point is the historic district in Savannah, Georgia: its urban grid, square, and sidewalk design are stellar examples of how a pedestrian-friendly city should work from front door to street edge
- In addition, one of the best ways that the public sector can assist in the enhancement of a city's character is to strategically place and contextually develop its own building projects.

historic district in Savannah, Georgia



Map Of Downtown Savannah Ga

- ❖ **Cities and counties have the opportunity to set the standard for public parks and institutions, including libraries, schools, fire and police stations, and the public spaces which adjoin these structures.**
- ❖ **In all cases, the placement and design of such new elements should conserve and support the existing natural and historic features of the place.**



Historic District, Savannah Georgia

3. Historic Preservation

- ▶ **historic preservation** has proven to be one of the best tools given to public officials to preserve a **neighborhood's sense of place** and then to influence that strength for new investment, tourism, and sustainable growth
- ▶ In many U.S. cities, the first “urban design” policies even passed were those for historic preservation. **Far from being an barrier to revitalization**
- ▶ Many cities have identified what is valuable about a particular place and have established **development regulations**, including those that **restrict demolition and encourage sensitive rehabilitation**, to confirm that place-defining buildings will be **maintained for future generations**.
- ▶ While people often associate historic preservation with the **saving and restorations of a single landmark building**, the **broader application of historic designations over entire districts** has been key to the successful urban revitalization of many cities.

Historic Preservation - City of Petaluma California



. Historic designations of several districts in Charleston, South Carolina preserved what is one of the world's most engaging urban designs, but also protected individual properties until economic forces aligned to reinvest in the area

4. Pedestrian Scale

- The use of the word scale simply addresses whether a built feature is sized appropriately for its location and how it will be experienced.
- From the sidewalk widths to building heights, size does matter in the creation of places that make us feel comfortable.
- To appreciate this, consider the experience of walking along sidewalks that are too narrow to feel safe near zooming cars or along endless blocks of wall that generate unpleasant feelings because of their severe monotony.
- Wherever pedestrian scale needs to be defended, its challenger is usually the automobile, or more correctly, the typical design response often produced by development regulations that place motorized vehicles at the top of the user hierarchy.

They can vary from tree-lined streets in pleasant zones to sufficient continuous-built canopies in an arid area.

- The guiding principle is that paths along which people move – whether sidewalks, bike paths or trails – should feel safe, engaging and appropriate for the climate so that pedestrians feel comfortable along the route.
- Another guiding principle for pedestrian scale is that the public places we create should be as comfortable for one person as for many.
- Parks should have spaces and paths that invite and functionally support multiple activities and audiences – from an individual sitting alone to hundreds attending a large event.



Example of Pedestrian Scale Environment

5. Signage

- signage is needed to direct people through their communities.
- Practice of signs: can be used
- 1. on private commercial property to locate businesses or to advertise the products and services they sell.
- 2. in the public domain to direct pedestrians, identify historic and entertainment districts, and to point out cultural institutions.
- 3. basic signs of traffic management, from rights of way to identifying parking spaces and garages.
- Taken as a whole these various signage components play as important a role as any other architectural or urban-design element.

5. Signage (continued)

- Signage scale, style and sometimes even context should be guided by local context.
- As public agencies deal with applying codes while also encouraging quality development,
- it is important to balance commercial interests with design guidelines that enhance the positive attributes of a place.
- Signage must be seen as an integral design component and not as an after-the-fact add-on to a community's design



Examples of creative, appropriate scale signage





Thank You

Any Questions?

