Practical Approaches To Your Parking Problems: Parking innovations advocated by Donald Shoup in his book, *The High Cost of Parking*, appear to be inspiring new initiatives in several cities. They include the application of market-based parking and parking benefit districts.

Market-Based Parking: Officials in Redwood City, CA will be implementing market-based parking to reduce the need to build expensive new parking spaces for a retail/movie complex opening downtown.

Currently, 15% of the parking spaces in the city’s downtown sit unoccupied while visitors cruise downtown streets looking for an empty parking space on the most heavily used blocks. Shoup’s theory says that if the price of parking in areas of most demand in the city are higher and the price of spaces in areas of less demand are lower, then the average availability of parking spaces will become the same all over downtown. This is because price as well as proximity to their destination dictates where people choose to park.

It is common practice in many cities for downtown employees to park in two-hour time zones while regularly moving their cars to avoid a ticket. The market system is expected to motivate downtown employees in Redwood City to park in garages or other areas where it will cost them less. According to downtown development coordinator Daniel Zack, “Time limits are extremely difficult to enforce, cause major headaches for our visitors, and don’t really work at creating vacant spaces anyway.”

Time limits are being completely eliminated in Redwood City. Prices for parking meters will be raised from 25 cents an hour to 75 cents an hour in the areas where the demand for parking is highest. Prices will be manipulated by block and time of day so that one out of every eight parking spaces is continually available throughout the downtown.

Officials in the City of Seattle are looking at a similar system in an area where on-street parking is currently free. The City is considering charging for parking and adjusting the hourly parking rates based on actual levels of demand. Their consultant has advocated installing wireless-networked meters so that the city can constantly monitor demand and adjust prices until they achieve the desired result.

Downtown Truckee is small enough that a tiered parking rate according to location isn’t needed. What is needed is an effective way to keep employees and others from occupying spaces all day. The City has switched from free downtown parking to meters with tiered prices: $1 per hour for the first two hours, $2 for the third hour, and $3 for the fourth hour. Pacific Grove has implemented the identical strategy around the Monterey Bay Aquarium.

Parking Benefit Districts: Some years ago, the City of Pasadena began charging for parking in Old Pasadena and giving the profits to downtown businesses for the purpose of making street improvements and keeping public areas clean. Redwood City and Truckee are now using the same strategy. Downtown business owners and property owners advise the City on how the money should be spent. Alternately, a downtown parking benefit district is created that enforces the rules and allocates parking fees to items such as beautifying sidewalks and alleys, adding trees, increasing street sweeping and adding more police patrols when necessary.

The money generated by paid parking can be significant. In Ventura, a consultant recently informed the City of Ventura that they could generate $2 to $3.7 million a year by gradually converting free street and garage spaces into fee parking.

National Smart Growth Conference Comes to Los Angeles in 2007! The 6th Annual New Partners for Smart Growth: Building Safe, Healthy and Livable Communities conference will be held at The Westin Bonaventure Hotel in downtown Los Angeles, February 8-10, 2007.

Over the past several years this dynamic event has grown in size and reputation and is now considered to be the “premier” smart growth conference held each year. Its unique multi-disciplinary approach brings together a diverse audience representing multiple sectors to network together, learn about new tools and strategies, hear the latest research, and to form new partnerships to create safer, healthier, and more livable communities everywhere.

We expect the 2007 New Partners Conference to be our largest and most dynamic event yet, building on the recent success of the 2006 conference in Denver, which boasted nearly 1,250 participants, over 250 speakers, and more than 80 sessions over three full days. With so much important smart growth work being done throughout California and in the Southern California Region, Los Angeles is the perfect venue for such an important event.

Plan to join us and participants from across
Form-Based Codes Catching on Everywhere: We reported in the November 2005 issue of the LPU that communities in Mississippi are looking to the form-based code as a tool for rebuilding their cities after Katrina. Now these codes are popping up in Texas and Ohio.

Leander, Texas is a rapidly growing suburb near Austin. The community adopted a form-based code last September for 2,000 acres. The code is expected to stimulate $2 billion in new development at a point where a commuter rail line from downtown Austin and a new toll road will terminate. The bulk of the development is on a greenfield site, although the code also covers part of the city’s Old Town.

The code requires buildings at least three stories high in the urban core and at least two stories in the urban center. Two other points on the transect are also coded, with residential densities required of 12 to 20 per acre, depending upon the location.

Landowners paid 85 percent of the cost of the $500,000 plan. They were motivated by the fact that the code will let builders know exactly what is expected and eliminate what would otherwise be a long planning and approval process. The City expects that the code will attract dense development that might not otherwise occur and will provide a boost to the city’s economy.

Cleveland, Ohio is using a form-based code to bring new development to some old and unsightly commercial corridors. Two neighborhood development corporations are working with Cleveland State University and the private sector to create a form-based code for one such site. If the effort is successful, it will be applied to several others.

Katrina Sparking Innovation: At a recent seminar organized by Yale University, it was noted that the devastating Katrina disaster should be viewed both as a tragedy and an opportunity. One of the several innovative bright lights that has emerged from the tragedy is a new low-cost housing alternative, the Katrina Cottage, a concept that breaks new ground in the affordable housing arena.

FEMA has been housing hurricane refugees in temporary trailers that have numerous disadvantages. They can’t weather a severe storm, they are homely and it has been reported that residents are experiencing a high degree of depression, assumed to be, in part, a result of living in an unattractive, crowded place with small windows. The lifespan of the trailers is short. And they aren’t cheap at $75,000 each.

Early this year, new urbanist architect Andres Duany called together a group of architects and challenged them to design something less expensive and better than the FEMA trailers. Out of this have come some product ideas that could be useful both on the Gulf Coast and elsewhere. Labeled the “Katrina Cottage,” the innovative housing alternative was designed, engineered, prefabricated, and built within three weeks. It costs less than $60,000, not including land acquisition.

A Katrina Cottage is “cute” and features a large shaded front porch and a design that reflects traditional Gulf Coast housing. It is made of prefabricated, panelized walls containing six inches of hard foam insulation sandwiched between sheets of a fibrous concrete. The same panels are used for the floor, walls and ceiling.

The Katrina Cottage is 14 by 22 feet plus an 8-foot-deep porch with bench seating. Photo courtesy of Sandy Sorlien

The Katrina Cottage is waterproof and can be cleaned up and re-inhabited after a flood. The basic design includes 470 square feet on the first floor plus a 300 square foot loft. The cottage is expandable to about 1,200 square feet and was the most popular exhibit at the 2006 International Builders Show.

The cottage concept has progressed furthest in Ocean Springs, Mississippi where two acres have been secured by a developer to accommodate up to 17 cottages. Houses will vary in size and will fit into a master plan that will reflect Smart Growth and New Urbanist Principles. There is even a version designed to serve commercial uses.

Asked what would happen if a Katrina Cottage encountered the California building code, architect Duany replied that it would not only meet the code, it would exceed it. At least one California developer is considering the Katrina Cottage as an answer to the affordable housing challenge in the Los Angeles region. For more information, google ‘Katrina Cottage.’

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