Studies Reveal Narrower Street Widths Are Safer: It seems intuitive to many of us who regularly get behind the wheel that a wide road offers an open invitation to speed, and speeding leads to accidents.

However, developers consistently find resistance to their proposals to build narrow, more pedestrian-friendly streets. According to developer Randall Lewis, transportation engineers and fire departments continue to argue that a wide, obstacle-free travel corridor is needed to keep motorists and the public safe.

Until recently, there was but one research study that documented the danger of wide streets to the public. A 1997 study by Peter Swift looked at 20,000 auto-related accidents in Longmont, Colorado over an eight-year period and documented a sixfold increase in injury accidents as streets increased in width from 24 feet to 40 feet. The most dangerous streets in the city of Longmont were 40 feet wide. Sadly, Swift’s study alone has not been enough to convince city transportation and fire officials that narrow streets are preferable to wide ones.

Fortunately, new research by Eric Dumbaugh, an assistant professor of transportation at Texas A&M, has verified Swift’s observations. His results have been published in the *Journal of the American Planning Association* and are soon to appear in the 2006 edition of *Transportation Research Record*.

Dumbaugh examined three state highways in Florida that have “livable,” pedestrian-friendly designs along parts of their length and conventional designs along other sections. The pedestrian-friendly sections were in downtown historic districts and featured street trees, on-street parking, and buildings close to the sidewalk.

Consistently, he found 40% fewer mid-block crashes and 28% fewer injury accidents, including pedestrian and bicyclist injuries as well as motorists, on the “livable” sections than on the conventional roadways.

According to Dumbaugh, “drivers are ‘reading’ the potential hazards of the road environment and adjusting their behavior in response.” Further, the Florida-based engineering firm of Glatting Jackson has noted research showing that “motorists need and benefit from tall vertical roadside features such as trees or buildings in order to properly gauge their speed.”

Dan Burden, now with Glatting Jackson, has been an advocate of narrow streets for some time, authoring the LGC’s guidebook, *Street Design Guidelines for Healthy Neighborhoods.* Burden urges city councils and other community leaders to exercise more control over “important decisions about things like urban street trees” instead of leaving such matters solely to transportation engineers.

The JAPA article can be downloaded in PDF form at www.planning.org/japa/pdf/JAPADumbaugh05.pdf.

Public Health Professionals Concerned About Land Use Decisions: The evidence of the link between land use forms, physical activity, and health is becoming increasingly compelling. As a result, a growing number of public health professionals are feeling a need to address growing obesity rates in their communities by addressing the design of neighborhoods.

In California numerous county public health offices are getting involved from the counties of Shasta, San Francisco, San Bernardino, San Francisco, Solano, San Joaquin and Riverside. Their programs are in various phases and take varying forms. Led by Solano County Supervisor John Vasquez, an initial LGC-sponsored workshop educated community groups and elected officials about the causes of the obesity epidemic. At this event, a majority of the 80-odd participants named better land use planning as the most important place for the county group to focus its efforts.

Vasquez followed up with a request to his public health agency for a follow-up event to identify what the agency’s role in land use planning should be. A December 11 workshop will bring in leading public health officials from Riverside County and Denver, CO to highlight their cutting-edge programs. Participants will break into groups to determine an appropriate course of action in Solano County.

On the other end of the spectrum, staff from Riverside County’s Department of Public Health has been working with developers for several years to assure more walkable new
development. During 2007, the Department will be working with the LGC and Riverside County planners to prepare a community plan for the unincorporated community of Mecca, CA based on walkable community principles and form-based codes. To our knowledge, this is the first time that a public health entity has taken the lead in proposing new zoning codes to promote walkability.

The LGC is now working with the National Association of City and County Health Officials (NACCHO), the American Planning Association, and the U.S. EPA to organize a day-long, invitation-only seminar with about 20 public health professionals from across the country who are at the cutting edge in working with their land use planners. Representatives of smart growth developers, city planners and local elected officials will participate in the seminar to discuss how the health professions can best further Smart Growth projects.

We hope the end result of the seminar will be a policy paper for adoption by NACCHO. We expect that the participating health officials will also benefit by getting information that might further improve the effectiveness of their already cutting-edge programs. For more info, contact Judy Corbett at jcorbett@lgc.org.

What IS Smart Growth? For some time, there has been fear among environmentalists that Smart Growth is just an excuse for more sprawl. On the other side of the fence, developers have been afraid that environmentalists are using Smart Growth as an excuse for stopping growth.

At last, a large and diverse national network has agreed upon a common description of Smart Growth. Thirty-two organizations—representing developers, realtors, affordable housing advocates, environmentalists, architects, planners, public health professionals, farmland preservation experts, transportation professionals, local government networks (including the LGC) and others have helped develop a new policy document titled, This Is Smart Growth.

This Is Smart Growth describes how, when done well, development can help create more economic opportunities, build great places where people want to live and visit, preserve the qualities people love about their communities, and protect environmental resources. When people ask what Smart Growth looks like, we can now point to a common vision.

The publication features 40 places around the country, from cities to rural communities, where good development and growth policies have improved residents’ quality of life. Photos illustrate how these communities have invested taxpayer money wisely, offered people more housing and transportation choices, protected natural lands, promoted healthy environments and created a lasting legacy for the community.

Development and publication of This is Smart Growth was funded through an agreement between the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the International City/County Management Association. It is available electronically at www.smartgrowth.org.

Toolkit for Affordable Housing Development: The Washington Area Housing Partnership recently compiled policies and planning tools that local governments can use to preserve and promote affordable housing development.

The Toolkit was developed in response to local leaders’ concerns that affordable housing is not financially within reach of many in the public and service sectors of their communities.

The best practices in the Toolkit provide specific information and resources about how local governments can apply planning tools and policies to make housing more affordable. The Toolkit examines how these best practices are structured and applied both in the metropolitan Washington region and throughout the country. It offers a wide range of local government approaches depending on the unique needs of a community.

There are eight topic sections: Policies and programs; preservation; design; financial tools; homeowner assistance; rental assistance; housing for special needs; and education/advocacy. The document can be downloaded free of charge at www.mwcog.org. Click on “Toolkit for Affordable Housing Development.”

Corrections from the August LPU Issue: Last month we highlighted the Vision Vessel, a high-tech, mobile, outdoor voting booth that educates and asks the opinion of residents about planning alternatives for the City of Portland, OR. Unfortunately, the photo of the Vision Vessel was printed as a negative. To do it justice, we’ve printed it again – in a positive light!

The Vision Vessel, a mobile idea station traveling around Portland, Oregon. Photo courtesy of Russ Calkins.

The August edition of the LPU also contained an incorrect web link. To obtain a copy of the International Economic Development Council’s guidebook titled, Economic Development and Smart Growth, visit www.iedconline.org.