Neighborhoods of the Future — Redefining What Is Normal: We repeatedly hear from mainstream developers and builders in the U.S. that we need to be building more “normal” places where people really want to live — that is, large lot, single-family homes in homogenous neighborhoods. At a local government conference in Melbourne on peak oil last month, we heard the same story from an influential representative of the building industry in Australia. However, the forward-thinking elected officials and planners in the audience strongly disagreed with the builder’s idea of normal as appropriate for today.

Evidence seems to be pointing in the direction of a new definition for the “good life,” a new normal that better reflects conditions in the 21st century and corrects the now-obvious problems created by what we have been building over the past 50 or 60 years.

The signs are everywhere. Young adults, with their pursuit of 24/7 lifestyles, have led the way back to the city. By 2000, they were 33% more likely than other Americans to live in neighborhoods close to the center of town. Interest in cycling has exploded, with commensurate responses by hundreds of local governments to make cycling easier and safer. Similarly, the local food movement has gained a foothold with the mainstream, with farmers markets popping up everywhere and vegetable gardening becoming more popular than golf. More Americans are choosing dense condo living than ever before, and households without a nuclear family are now the majority. Suburbs are now redesigning ‘normal’ strip development into compact, mixed-use neighborhoods complete with attractive public spaces. Zipcar has made the idea of Americans sharing a car almost normal. Perhaps the most surprising thing is that Americans have reduced their driving for the first time since World War II.

While many individual changes are afoot, they have not yet come together into a compelling picture of a good life that the average person can imagine for him/herself, one that will counter the mainstream developers’ idea of what is normal.

However, with the invention of the form-based code, change seems to be on the way. This new planning tool assists planners in helping community residents imagine a better place to live, then develop easy to understand zoning regulations that create the proper DNA for making the shared vision happen, over time. While many have implemented form-based codes on a smaller scale, the City of Miami is the first major metropolitan area to propose using a form-based code to involve residents in redesigning an entire city.

With strong leadership from the Mayor, the City Council is well on its way to adopting “Miami 21” — a proposal to develop a city-wide form-based zoning code that will offer a holistic approach to land use and urban planning. According to the Mayor’s Office, Miami 21 will take into account all of the integral factors that will make each area within the City a unique, vibrant place to live, learn, work and play.

When completed, the code will provide a clear vision for the City that will be supported by specific guidelines and regulations so that future generations will reap the benefits of a new way of living — “a rich quality of life” and a new normal.

Institute of Medicine Recommends Smart Growth: The National Academy of Sciences Institute of Medicine has joined the Centers for Disease Control, pediatricians, and other health-related entities in promoting local government action toward the creation of compact, walkable communities.

In the United States, 16.3% of children and adolescents between the ages of two and nineteen are obese, decreasing the life expectancy of today’s generation of kids and diminishing their overall quality of life. This has a huge cost — $41 billion dollars in 2006 in California alone, to be exact. By comparison, our current state budget deficit is $24 billion.

Telling kids to get more exercise and eat their fruits and vegetables does no good if they can’t walk to school or a grocery store, have no safe place to play, and are surrounded by vending machines and fast food restaurants offering unhealthy food. Because local governments make decisions every day that influence these unhealthy choices, the Institute considers local leadership critical to addressing the obesity crisis.

To that end, the National Academy invited LGC Land Use Director, Paul Zykovsky and others, to participate in the writing of the Institute of Medicine’s new report, Local Government Actions to Prevent Childhood Obesity. For a copy, go to www.nap.edu/catalog/12674.html.
Transportation Research Board Calls For Compact, Mixed-Use Development as a Greenhouse Gas Reduction Strategy: The 2005 Energy Policy Act mandated that the Transportation Research Board examine the potential for development patterns to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Not surprisingly, the Board has now determined that yes, changing our current land use patterns could impact VMT and carbon dioxide emissions. What is new is that this federal entity now is speaking out in support of local government policies that modify the way we currently grow.

Their key findings state: “Doubling residential density across a metropolitan area might lower household VMT by 5 to 12%, and perhaps by as much as 25%, if coupled with higher employment concentrations, significant public transit improvements, mixed uses, and other supportive demand management measures.”

Further, the report says: “More compact, mixed-use development can produce reductions in energy consumption and CO\textsubscript{2} emissions both directly and indirectly” — thereby acknowledging that townhomes use less energy than do houses on large, residential lots.

The report also notes that the relative reductions in energy consumption and CO\textsubscript{2} emissions will keep growing over time as an increasing percentage of the population lives and works in walkable neighborhoods and regions connected by transit.

Finally, the Transportation Research Board recommends that, “policies that support more compact, mixed-use development and reinforce its ability to reduce VMT, energy use, and CO\textsubscript{2} emissions should be encouraged.”


Federal Entities Join Private Sector in Promoting a Multi-Pronged Approach: Another comprehensive analysis released in August confirms that the most effective way to address VMT and CO\textsubscript{2} emissions is not a singular approach. To meet 2050 greenhouse gas reduction goals, we must combine long term measures like changes in development patterns and land use with near term measures such as public transit services, driving at lower speeds, and congestion pricing.

The study estimates the annual savings in vehicle costs to consumers will exceed the cost of enacting these strategies by as much as $112 billion.

Moving Cooler is sponsored by a surprisingly diverse group of transportation interests from both the public and private sector including entities such as: Shell Oil, the Federal Highway Administration, the Urban Land Institute, American Public Transportation Association, Environmental Protection Agency, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and many others.

Basically, Shell and the Federal Highway Administration are agreeing that smart growth and transit expansions would sharply reduce greenhouse gas emissions (up to 24% below baseline by 2050 without any technological improvements) and would save money.

The executive summary, fact sheet and other information are available at www.moving-cooler.info.

City of Berkeley’s Climate Action Plan Available Online: In November of 2006, Berkeley residents voted to take bold action on global warming — to reduce the entire community’s greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050. Since that time, the City has undertaken an extensive process of citizen education and participation in an effort to identify strategies for meeting that goal, one that would be embraced by all its citizens. The effort was not without controversy. However, in June of this year, the final plan was approved unanimously by the City Council.

Timothy Burroughs, formerly with ICLEI, was hired to take charge of creating the plan. His first step was to inventory energy use in the City. As in many communities, gasoline consumed by car transportation is at the top of the list, representing 29% of the total. Gas and electricity use by the residential and commercial sectors came in second, at 26% and 28% respectively. Diesel transportation accounted for 17%.

The final plan is presented in the form of a vision of life in Berkeley in 2050. New and existing buildings will have zero net energy consumption due to increased energy efficiency and a shift to renewable sources. Public transit, walking and cycling will be the primary means of transportation for both residents and visitors, with personal vehicles running on either electric or produced from renewables or low-carbon fuels.

All wastes will be recycled or reused – nothing will go to a landfill. The majority of residents’ food will be produced locally, within a few hundred miles.

The community will be resilient and prepared for the impacts of global warming with the social and economic benefits of climate protection efforts shared across all segments of the community.

Success will require Berkeley’s residents to change their behaviors and that effort has started already. Residents are encouraged to change their commute — riding a bike, walking or taking transit at least one day a week. They are asked to unplug appliances when not in use, and to generate less waste. Water consumption should be reduced and residents are asked to join a community garden or grow fruits and vegetables at their residence.

The plan also details specific steps that will be implemented over the next 12 years by the public and private sectors. To view a copy of the report and hear about other related activities, visit the City’s Climate Action web page at: www.berkeleyclimateaction.org.

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