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**New Urbanism:**  
**An Examination of New Developments**  
**Done the Old Way**

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Former Vice-President of the United States, Al Gore, when asked about the issue of sprawl remarked, "While the blight of poor development and its social consequences have many names, the solutions, pioneered by local citizens, are starting to coalesce into a movement. In the future, livable communities will be the basis of our competitiveness and economic strength." Mr. Gore's remarks concerning sprawl not only illustrate the significance of urban sprawl but more importantly they show the magnitude to which this problem has escalated. New Urbanism, a movement towards the aforementioned livable communities, represents the most viable solution to the problems of urban sprawl. Such problems affect every human being daily and their root, urban sprawl, has spread into the crosshairs of many of the most influential leaders. Ever since the end of World War II, residential and commercial development has stretched the density of our human population in the United States but beginning with communities like Seaside, Florida and Rosa Vista, Arizona, the progressive New Urbanism movement has staged a revival of livable, walkable, and sustainable communities which combine efforts from environmentalists, planners, architects, families, businesses and more to combat the problems of traffic congestion, pollution, structural degradation, expensive housing, and social segregation.

New Urbanism's roots can be found in several different places around the world and even in many areas of the United States which feature the community lifestyle. New Urbanism is not necessarily a new concept; the term was just revived and coined in the past 25 years to reflect a movement inspired by many influences. New Urbanism's history can be assembled using several essential pieces from different sources. One of the earlier pieces which could be viewed as the actual spatial and original planning piece

originated in many recognized urban centers of Europe such as Rome, Paris, and London. Another piece, perhaps representing the community piece, can be found in early east coast villages such as Jamestown. Additionally, another piece originated from the west coast and influenced much of the environmentally conscious aspect of New Urbanism. More recently, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly communities existed in places like Lake Forest near Chicago and Atlanta's Inman Park during the 1920's which many consider to be the watershed era of urban planning (Katz x).

The history of New Urbanism is important because essentially the movement seeks to establish communities and developments which embrace times past. In other words, New Urbanism communities are attempts to revert to former ways of living and interacting, essentially moving back in time. This explains Seaside's motto, "The New Town...The Old Ways". However, many, especially those most responsible for the New Urbanism movement, would argue that its principles are in fact a progression towards a more modern and futuristic style of living. In fact, the movement can borrow from more technological improvements over the past few decades to enhance the effectiveness of a New Urbanism movement. New technology such as high-speed internet and video-conferencing capabilities make "long-distance working" more feasible (Katz x). New Urbanism seeks to modernize communities by simplifying them. Who's to say that in order to progress as humans, our lives must become more complicated? With all the added stress and confusion that manages to pile on top of each other in individuals' daily lives, a simpler way of life would seem like a welcome approach. In reality, there is a large percentage of the population who desire a simpler, community style of living. The Congress of New Urbanism has found consistently through surveys that 15% of the

United States' population prefer a more compact, walkable neighborhood over one consisting of large spacious land plots ([www.cnu.org](http://www.cnu.org)). The percentage has doubled in more recent surveys and retirees and empty-nesters are four times more likely to desire such a community than young people. There is obviously a large demand for this style of living and it should continue to grow. As with most trends from everything from fashion to technology, the most recent advances generally migrate inward from both coasts. New Urbanism is no different. The largest groups of New Urbanism supporters can be found in coastal states like California, Florida, Oregon, and New York. There is no doubt that the popularity of New Urbanism will spread, but its success depends on the cooperative help from many different angles.

New Urbanism is a collective effort from several different functional areas to solve a number of global problems such as pollution, social isolation, racial and monetary segregation, and other ill effects of urban sprawl. Many people regard the New Urbanism movement in a romantic light, consisting of fairy-tale, cookie-cutter communities developed solely by greedy developers. This "Pleasantville" utopia image shared by many cloaks the true passion behind the movement and its benevolence towards many of society's problems. Most of these problems that New Urbanism seeks to alleviate began during the period following World War II. Following the war, residential development was geared toward suburban flight and highway capacity increased. Eventually, suburbs to suburbs began to develop and the enhanced highway system contributed to people spending more time commuting between suburbs than from suburb to city (Katz xii). This residential sprawl was a result of a number of factors. First of all, it was much easier to build mass-produced neighborhoods rather than to renovate existing older

structures. With so much land available, developers were free to harvest large lots of land and greedily take advantage of current desires to escape urban congestion while paying little attention to the environment. Americans sought ideals such as privacy, mobility, security, and their own home by moving to the suburbs. However, the suburban movement presented these new homeowners with isolation, greater congestion, increased crime, pollution and an increased cost of living shouldered by taxpayers, businesses, and sadly the environment (Katz xii). Urban sprawl required 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> cars per household to acquire daily necessities and escape the isolation and emptiness that suburban life had created. Consequently, as families migrated into suburbia in a manner unharmonious with the natural environment, the lifeblood of urban town centers was drained and they were left to deteriorate.

While suburbs multiplied vigorously and development seemingly progressed, American's conception of the "American Dream", the inspiration of pre-World War II homebuilding, stalled. Katz writes, "...we continue to build post-World War II suburbs as if families were large and had only one breadwinner, the jobs were all downtown, land and energy were endless and another lane on the freeway would end traffic congestion" (xii). Unfortunately, families have become smaller and more separated, a greater percentage of both parents work full-time, jobs have been dispersed throughout urban centers and their collective suburbs, energy has become a precious and even dangerously limited commodity, and freeways are gobbling up land as the cars that use them destroy the environment. Society's solutions to these problems include massive single-use box-stores such as Home Depots and Toys R Us, gated communities, and colossal, gasoline chugging SUVs. Zoning laws and development patterns in the decades following World

War II encouraged segregation of groups based on age, income, ethnicity, and family style. The growing developments trends waged a futile war with nature. Threatened natural environments countered environment degradation with cancer-causing sunlight, polluted air that damaged human lungs, acid rain that devoured vegetation, toxic soil which deterred plant growth, and contaminated water sources, the catalyst to all life (xiii).

The problems mentioned above are obviously extremely significant issues that cannot be solved easily. However, New Urbanism supporters believe that the design of a city should incorporate the ideas of not only architects and planners, but also developers, engineers, logistics personnel, builders, bureaucrats, environmentalists, landscape architects, and ordinary citizens (Bressi 45). In the past, developments have excluded all but one or two of these groups which has essentially caused the problems that New Urbanists look to fix. Landscape architects aid in helping build developments that are within the natural environment. Transportation professionals contribute suggestions that preserve the effectiveness of public transportation, a key New Urbanism fundamental. Environmentalists ensure that developments preserve the integrity of the environment through such activities as incorporating natural vegetation into the development and eliminating unnecessary and wasteful land uses. Bureaucrats and lawyers, although often maligned, provide valuable guidance, structure, and proper legal procedure during the development process. Ordinary citizens as well provide valuable insight into regional trends, traditions, and history. These citizens come from a variety of backgrounds to provide a well-rounded, mixed-bag insight towards developments. Perhaps the most important groups becoming involved in the New Urbanism movement are politicians. Politicians possess the greatest ability to institute change in urban design and now that

they are beginning to realize the importance of urban planning the movement has the potential to quickly gain much needed momentum. Politicians' influence must come at all levels from the White House down to the local mayor's office. The ideas of New Urbanism have reached as high as the Vice-President's office and many state governments including one state notorious for its concrete expansion. A recent Governor of New Jersey, a state recognized more for its urban sprawl than its gardens, Christine Todd Whitman, spoke to the concerns of her state's citizens and New Urbanists nationwide in her inaugural address (Leccese 3). In it she states, "Every part of New Jersey suffers when we plan haphazardly....Sprawl eats up our open space. It creates traffic jams that boggle the mind and pollute the air. Sprawl can make one feel downright claustrophobic about our future." Obviously, there is a widespread concern over urban sprawl whose solution lies in the inputs of several different parties. Solving this problem requires coordination, however, to gather these ideas and slowly combine them into an implementation plan. This long overdue process was implemented in the early 90s with the formation of the Congress for New Urbanism.

Formed in 1993 by some of the most influential architects, developers, planners, environmentalists, and other key support groups, the Congress for the New Urbanism was an attempt to gather and hone the ideas of many of the initial supporters of the movement. Alexandria, Virginia served as the inaugural site of the Congress eleven years after Seaside had begun the movement but several decades overdue in the minds of 170 of the nation's leading designers and practitioners. Participants discussed countless issues from the placelessness of suburbia to environmental damage that current developments were wreaking. Hardly topics that could be solved or merely discussed in

a matter of days, six leaders emerged that would guide the Congress through its development and organization. Peter Calthorpe, Andres Duany, Elizabeth Moule, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, Stefanos Polyzoides, and Daniel Solomon are the names of the six architects who established the Congress for the New Urbanism as a nonprofit organization which, much like the founders of the United States, released a guidebook for the movement called the Charter of the New Urbanism in 1996 (Leccese 2-3). The Congress has been convening and advancing their cause annually ever since they met for the inaugural meeting. The Preamble for the Charter begins, “The Congress for the New Urbanism views disinvestment in central cities, the spread of placeless sprawl, increasing separation by race and income, environmental deterioration, loss of agricultural lands and wilderness, and the erosion of society’s built heritage as one interrelated community-building heritage. We stand for the restoration of existing urban centers and towns with coherent metropolitan regions, the reconfiguration of sprawling suburbs into communities of real neighborhoods and diverse districts, the conservation of natural environments, and the preservation of our built legacy.”

It is relatively easy to read these first few paragraphs about New Urbanism and question whether any of the Congress’ ideas are unique at all. Not one of the 170 people present at the initial Congress would argue that their urban design concept was or is an entirely unique concept. In fact, many of its principles are simply recycled ideas from the past. However, there are several unique aspects of the concept that are responsible for its revolutionary effect on urban planning. A unified effort is one of the distinguishing and most important ideals (Leccese 6). New Urbanists recognize that urban planning is going to take the cooperation and input from all angles and viewpoints instead of just from

developers and architects. New Urbanists are realists. They understand that it is impossible to undo much of the damage done in terms of urban development over the past 40-50 years. However, another distinguishing characteristic of the progressive movement is its approach of creating new design concepts to counter current and future situations (7). Some of these include the limitation of the boundaries of metropolitan regions, linking existing areas with innovative forms of transportation, and new policies and rules to prevent past problems from recurring. The Preamble goes on to say, "We recognize that physical solutions by themselves will not solve social and economic problems, but neither can economic vitality, community stability, and environmental health be sustained without a coherent and supportive physical framework." Additionally, another innovation of New Urbanism that distinguishes it from past urban design ideals is the realization that ideas of urban design and planning must not be separated from their implementation mechanism. This last ideal follows the belief that many problems, especially the ones that New Urbanism looks to solve, are a result of existing policies and structures. Fixing these, therefore will fix the problem. For example, commercial property zoning regulations such as maximum grade restrictions force developers to simply bulldoze and destroy native vegetative environments. Changing these regulations will alleviate this problem. Another example is found in enormous suburban residential developments which consist of equally divided land lots and similarly constructed houses. This results in little diversity of income and family size and leaves little if any room for public amenities. Instead, New Urbanism promotes a variety of lot and housing sizes and styles to incorporate a variety of incomes and ethnicities (9). Finally, the Congress distinguishes itself from other urban design movements by incorporating more

than just architects and other design professionals. As the Preamble states, “We represent a broad-based citizenry composed of public and private sector leaders, community activists, and multidisciplinary professionals. We are committed to reestablishing the relationship between the art of building and the making of community, through citizen-based participatory planning and design.” The Congress does not naively believe they have developed a formula for solving many of society’s most problematic issues, rather they insist their movement is a solid step towards the reclamation of their “homes, blocks, streets, parks, neighborhoods, districts, towns, cities, regions, and environment” (11).

New Urbanism institutes its principles of a community lifestyle through three different layers. The first and largest layer is the region which includes the metropolis, the city, and the town. Developments within this division of the movement are the most recognizable due mainly to their large scale and success. Seaside is a perfect example of a development that would be classified within this layer. The region is very important primarily because it is the largest division of the New Urbanism structure and therefore policies enacted within the region regulate the largest areas of land. However, policies aimed at correcting problems within the regional level of urban design have been largely ineffective. This ineptitude results from policymakers attempting to fix the symptoms of societal problems rather than the root causes (Leccese 16). For example, pollution is regulated through emissions standards, congestion through construction of more freeways, and gasoline consumption through more efficient vehicles such as hybrids. However, New Urbanism advocates stepping back and visualizing the bigger picture. Vehicle use is the central cause of all the above problems and a more efficient public transportation system coupled with regional planning that decreases automobile use in

favor of walking are the more sensible solutions. Once regional guidelines are established, the remaining two layers of New Urbanism structure can operate more smoothly.

Another important aspect of the regional level of New Urbanism is the harmony of nature and development within designated boundaries. Leading environmental New Urbanists such as Robert Yaro and Randall Arendt argue that recognizing boundaries derived from coastlines, farmlands, and river basins and developing harmony with the natural environment are beneficial both ecologically and economically. Yaro is confident that many towns and cities are beginning to reject sprawl and realizing the potential profits from environmental harmony. He writes, "By preserving green space, protecting watersheds, investing in transit, and directing growth toward established areas, well-planned metropolitan regions are protecting their environmental health" (Leccese 23). Fundamental within the New Urbanism concept is the development of a comprehensive plan to incorporate innovative solutions. Arendt, like many other New Urbanists, argues that a central component of comprehensive plans involves revoking many current problematic zoning regulations. With respect to farmland, he believes current incentives to preserve open space such as transfers and purchases of development rights are minimally effective unless combined with new zoning regulations that cluster development (32). The theory is that huge parcels of land can be ruined by the curious placement of only a few buildings. However, if these buildings are clustered in one area as required by zoning regulations, then enormous networks of open farmland can be conjoined.

Stepping down a level yields the neighborhoods, districts, and corridors which collectively make up the face of the regional level. This division of the New Urbanism presents an interesting approach for in this level neighborhood, district, and corridor developments must integrate the details of traditional urban environments with the modern, technological world found in many of the newer suburbs (Leccese 71). The most important element of the neighborhood, district, and corridor level is the implementation of mixed-use places. This concept replaces the destructive single-use system which isolated many areas. Several important principles have been established concerning the neighborhood, district, and corridor. New Urbanism has borrowed from a New York residential planner named Clarence Perry in establishing a circular area with a radius the length of distance traveled during a 5-minute walk (74). Within this neighborhood framework, mixed-use developments exist that include different house and apartment sizes plus local stores, schools, and civic buildings. The motivation behind this arbitrary 5-minute radius lies in the fact that Mr. Perry believed and many New Urbanists agree that individuals should feel safe and comfortable walking towards areas that fulfill their daily needs. A maximum 10 minute walk is responsive to the needs of both elderly retirees and hyper children.

The availability of daily necessities and even desires within walking distance such as fresh food, shopping, schooling, and mail service is very important in New Urbanism communities because it addresses one of the central issues, social segregation. Seaside has one of the greatest frameworks to encourage social interaction and the benefits are enormous. Human interaction is one level on the pyramid of Maslow's hierarchy of needs and satisfying this need soothes other problems such as stress and depression.

Social interaction also contributes to the mental progression of each individual as they listen and incorporate the ideas of others while sharing their own. This need has become ever more increasingly important in the technological age society is currently growing up in. Although most New Urbanists view such technological advances as the internet and wireless technology as an integral part of the New Urbanism approach, it must also be moderated. People must learn to balance their social lives with their family lives along with their business lives. It is not uncommon in today's society for someone to take care of all their personal, familial, and vocational responsibilities from the comfort of their living room. This approach, however, is not consistent with New Urbanism doctrine as it fails to incorporate the crucial element of social interaction. Other principles of this medium level of New Urbanism are the definition of a neighborhood center and an edge, an interconnected network of streets with concern to buildings and traffic both pedestrian and automobile, and perhaps most importantly a primacy of public space over private space (Katz xvii). The neighborhood, district, corridor level collectively make up the pieces of the regional level. While regional zoning regulations are crucial, individual projects aimed at reversing the trend of separating dwelling from shops, workplaces, schools, parks, and churches is the responsibility of the mid-level neighborhood (xx). Replacing zoning regulations on the regional level simply accelerates and ameliorates the process.

Descending further towards the most basic level of New Urbanism philosophy reveals the street, the block, and the building. The fate of such elements of the movement's structure is determined through policy planning developed in the two previous levels of New Urbanism. Instead of policy planning, the unique fundamentals

of the smallest level of New Urbanism stem from the design of the streets, blocks, and building. It is difficult to understand how an individual street or building can represent the essence of the New Urbanism movement. Rather it appears that these small elements are necessary pieces to the bigger levels of development such as the neighborhood and town. However, upon closer inspection, there are even smaller parts and influences that collectively form the street, block, and building. These smaller parts and influences give this lowest level its New Urbanism signature. The use and historical context of the area are two factors that govern the design of buildings and such. New Urbanism developments emphasize the presence of public space to encourage social interaction. This is accomplished on the most basic level through accessible and spacious lobbies within buildings, contextually appropriate sidewalk widths, and pedestrian friendly streets. Buildings, streets, and blocks are built within the public realm and represent a collaborative effort from professional and the public alike to create structures that individually represent the urban design philosophy (Katz xxii). Collectively these individual parts, designed to coexist with their environment yet independently expressing New Urbanism ideals, combine to form the neighborhood, district, and corridor level of the movement. These groups proceed to jointly assemble the largest level of New Urbanism structure, the regional level.

These principles of New Urbanism have been instilled successfully across the country to promote the central ideals of the community style of living: diversity, complexity, and inclusivity. Seaside was the first and most successful New Urbanism community from several standpoints. This development will be discussed in much greater detail later in the paper. However, Seaside has a tendency to overshadow some

developments that are nearly as successful as the first. The Kentlands in Gaithersburg, Maryland is one example. Developed in 1988 by Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, the same couple who originally designed Seaside, this development is viewed as the first true year-round community (Katz 31). The Kentlands exhibits evidence of the leading principles of New Urbanism throughout its 356-acre Kent Farm location just 23 miles outside of Washington D.C. (perhaps another reason for the increased New Urbanism interest among politicians). The town consists of 6 explicit defined neighborhoods each with the essential pieces of a walkable community including houses, offices, civic buildings, and cultural and retail establishments. Just as the urban design movement preaches, the Kentlands seeks diversity on an income and age scale by offering a wide range of housing sizes and styles (31). The community has placed carriage houses which can serve as retirement homes directly next to single-family houses and mixed-size rental apartments can be found above most of the retail stores. The community also incorporates the ideal of inclusivity through various public parks and green areas. There is a lake, a wetland preserve and many public squares that help to define the boundaries of individual neighborhoods. As far as the incorporation of the original environment is concerned, the developers of the Kentlands did a fabulous job of leaving many of the original Kent farm structures and vegetation on the land plot and in fact converting some of them into public, cultural centers (32). The Kentlands possesses an operating school system and church as well anchor department stores that bookend the 3 major arterial roadways which prevent excessive automobile traffic. The Kentlands consists of around 1,600 residences with a population of around 5,000. This development is significant for several reasons. First of all, as mentioned above, it is the first true New

Urbanistic community that lacks the resort type atmosphere that Seaside enjoys (due primarily to the lack of a nearby beach). The Kentlands also employs many of the same town building codes as Seaside but it presents more dwelling options which significantly target racial and economic segregation. Garages are located in the rear of houses along with utility poles accessible by alley. This eliminates the need for a frontal driveway and together with the minute yards and small space between houses this design creates an incredibly socially integrative environment (43-44).

Another groundbreaking development called Rosa Vista is tearing down negative connotations of manufactured housing and preconceived notions of a rigid New Urbanism philosophy. Developed in Mesa, Arizona in the early 90s, Rosa Vista consists of manufactured housing that is not only inexpensive but also very attractive to all ages. Manufactured housing is not necessarily trailer homes; in fact this village does not contain a single trailer. The houses are merely HUD-approved and constructed off-site and transported on wheel frames. Once in place, this form of manufactured housing is securely attached to the ground for decades and costs 35% less than traditional style houses (Katz 89). The advantages of manufactured housing are obvious but there are barriers that make this historic development even more impressive. The public perception of manufactured housing is that of cheap and tacky, "plastic" structures. Therefore, it is not surprising to see many efforts from individuals to limit or block such housing developments through zoning policies in an attempt to protect surrounding real estate values. However, the design team headed once again by the dynamic couple, Duany and Plater-Zyberk, did extensive research and planning to use the qualities of manufactured housing within the New Urbanism framework. Interestingly enough,

through their research, the team discovered that many of the characteristics of traditional manufactured housing developments such as close placement of units, a defined boundary, and numerous common areas were similar to New Urbanistic guidelines (90). Following their extensive research, the Rosa Vista design team instituted such guidelines as the placement of the fronts of housing units near the primary means of pedestrian traffic, wide unpaved roads behind the units to allow the delivery and placement of additional houses, and creative floor plans that divest from traditional manufactured housing plots. This establishment was very significant as Katz explains, “While... recognition probably won’t affect broad public perception of manufactured housing, it shows that architects and other design professionals are starting to take an interest in a widely used form of housing that they have long shunned” (90).

The previous two examples have focused on developments constructed almost from scratch; Riviera Beach in Palm Beach County, Florida is quite different. Development on this project began in 1991 in this county notorious for luxury homes and expensive shopping outlets. Unlike the prior examples, Riviera Beach was different in the sense that buildings already existed that comprised the town structure. Long acting as the utilitarian home of all the unsightly buildings from surrounding towns, Riviera Beach was the poorest city in the county and operated the local power plant and housed ugly commercial fishing operations. Greedy developers saw immense profit potential from the town’s large collection of waterfront property. Luckily, the community’s development board was wise enough to lead a citizen-inspired drive to rejuvenate the city’s downtown and surrounding network using the New Urbanism approach (Katz 135). Therefore, the development process was unique in that existing structures would be preserved and

tailored towards the progressive urban design movement. The 1600-acre site includes nine mixed-use neighborhoods, each designed to meet the daily needs of its inhabitants within a quarter-mile walking distance. Following the ideals of New Urbanism, Riviera Beach redeveloped their main street to encourage pedestrian traffic. A streetwall and sidewalk arcades were built and Bicentennial Park was moved from into the interior of the city from its waterfront location resulting in a new city center and shopping district. Riviera Beach incorporated the input of all its citizens in a unique fashion using computer simulations to illustrate proposed design improvements (136-137). This practice was very innovative especially on this large scale of a project. Additional improvements included shared parking lots located in the rear of buildings, a much more simplified zoning code that could actually fit on one sheet of paper, and recognizable neighborhood centers along with a distinct town center (137-141).

Many college campuses around the country possess several characteristics resembling the New Urbanism philosophy. The communal living, extensive use of public transportation, and the large presence of common areas to encourage social integration are a few of the glaring such examples. Even the University of Tennessee could be cited as a good example of this especially considering the university's master plan to eliminate dangerous vehicular traffic from the campus. However, one school out west is taking consciously taking steps to create an authentic New Urbanism campus. The Highland District in Tucson, Arizona home of the University of Arizona has developed a master plan with a significant New Urbanism background. Instead of building high-rise residential and educational buildings similar to Tennessee's Carrick residential dorm and McLung Tower, developers have designed a community of low-rise buildings enveloping

a central square (Katz 199). The inspiration behind the development was the university's desire to shift from a commuter school to a more residential one. This required housing to hold more than 3,000 students. The most common approach would have been a few high-rise buildings but the university wanted to create a greater sense of community which led them to the design of the community of low-rise buildings (199). Led by Elizabeth Moule and Stefanos Polyzoides, the design team created a community laced with regional accents such as self-shading courtyards to combat the piercing sun and many of the campus' elements are configured to save energy and resources. The physical structure of the campus plan also contributes to the feel of the New Urbanism philosophy. As Katz writes, "Student rooms are organized into clusters around the small, private garden courtyards. The larger and more public courtyards closer to Highland Avenue are surrounded by common spaces, including living and study areas" (200). Lastly, each dorm is meant to act as its own sustaining community within the larger campus framework.

Each of the previous examples advanced the New Urbanism movement in their own right but many of them exist because of the most recognized and celebrated town of the New Urbanism, Seaside Florida, which represents the beginning of this urban planning movement that stands as a testament to its immense societal, social, and economic success. Formed in 1982 by an ambitious man named Robert Davis, Seaside was the first community to exhibit the virtues of the urban design movement known today as New Urbanism. Robert Davis was fresh out of Harvard Business School when he sought young architects to construct a town along the beaches in the panhandle of Florida. The architects he chose to help him with the initial stages of the development

were Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, a couple who would turn out to have a primary role in the progress of the movement over the next 25 years.

Robert Davis spent his childhood summers on the beaches of the Gulf Coast, particularly on his grandfather's plot of land in what is now known as Seaside (Brooke 13). J.S. Smolian, Mr. Davis's grandfather, purchased the land ironically enough around the time of World War II for \$100 per acre with the dream of eventually developing it into summer retreat for his employees at his Birmingham department store. Instead, it was his grandson's vision that would become the successful reality it is today. Davis, along with his wife Daryl, did extensive research of the area and its architecture and eventually ran into Duany and Plater-Zyberk. In a recent issue of *Index* magazine, Plater-Zyberk describes the events that led to the meeting. In it the recent architectural school graduate said, "After school there was no work in our field up north, so little by little a group of us assembled in Miami. An editor at *House Beautiful*, Susan Lewin, who was always putting designers and clients together, introduced us to Robert Davis, a young MBA who was interested in working with architects on his development projects. Seaside primarily grew out of his relationship with my husband, Andres Duany. They really bonded over the idea of making a traditional town of very modest ambitions" (58). Little did they know, Seaside's modest ambitions would turn into a global phenomenon. So the young MBA and architect couple began planning the historic town.

Attention to detail was important to Seaside as most of the initial specifications such as sand walkways throughout the town plot, white picket fences around each cottage, and screened porches still enhance the attractiveness of the community to this day. They constructed a building code that allowed homeowners to choose any architect

to construct their town as long as they adhered to the code (Brooke 18). Robert Davis desired a community where tennis shoes were the primary source of transportation. He sought safe streets, generous boulevards, comfortably scaled buildings, indigenous landscape and “an atmosphere of neighborliness... a familiarity that promotes even the practice of cutting through backyards.” The influence of these sentiments can easily be seen in the New Urbanistic principles that were recorded in the Charter of the New Urbanism over a decade later. With the first two houses built and the Building Code finalized, Seaside was poised to grow. Interesting characteristics of the Code included mandatory yards made up of sand and native scrub and not grass, pastel-colored houses, and a Gazebo built at the end of the first street which served a public gateway to the beach, a strong change from high-rise condominiums which prevent public access. It didn't take long for the public to realize Seaside's potential as home sales grew rapidly. Seaside quickly gained recognition as a revolutionary model for urban and suburban growth as Brooke illustrates, “The unambiguous logic of the overall Seaside Plan – the pedestrian-scaled and well-proportioned streets, the accessible beach pavilions, the harmonious grouping of residential and commercial buildings, the absence of high-rise beachside-condos – makes a persuasive case for Seaside's underlying message: civilized liveability” (22).

Seaside's success can be attributed to a number of factors. Some of these include the award-winning collection of beautiful architecture designed by many of the world's most renowned architects, Seaside's close proximity to large urban areas such as Atlanta, Birmingham, and Memphis, and the large presence of public space and pedestrian-friendly walkways that promote social interaction. Also, its continued success can be

attributed to many of the friendly and eclectic families that live in Seaside such as the Modica family that operates the local grocer, the Speight family responsible for many of the interior decorating, the Miller family who run the chapel in Seaside, and families like the Forsythes who share their artistic talents to homeowners and visitors alike. Seaside's location on the doorstep of the Gulf of Mexico with its beautiful sugar sand beaches cannot be overlooked. Finally, Seaside's international recognition from leading magazines, newspapers, television shows, architectural societies, and even movie studios (The Truman Show starring Jim Carrey was filmed in Seaside) has contributed largely to the town's legacy.

Seaside's population is well over 2000 people but outside of a homeowner's weekend it would be nearly impossible to find that many homeowners living in the town at one time. Several hundred people do live full-time within the Seaside community and the ideals of the New Urbanism movement are exemplified to the greatest extent among these individuals. However, as Robert Davis openly admits himself, Seaside is not the ideal New Urbanism community. Seaside lacks some essential elements of a truly self-sustaining New Urbanistic community such as factories and industries. The land plot has been maxed out and there is no room left to build such amenities limiting the amount of workplace opportunities. Davis is aware of these limitations and described the situation with a statement that said, "Seaside's success as a holiday town means that daily and weekly rentals are more profitable than annual leases; thus the garage apartments, apartments above the stores, and other smaller building types which, in other circumstances, might provide affordable housing for workers, instead provide less expensive accommodations for vacationers" (Brooke 27). While Seaside might not

represent the perfect or ideal New Urbanism city, one must be aware of its revolutionary design especially considering its status as the very first development based on the principles of New Urbanism. Seaside's significance cannot be overrated as it basically established the framework and foundation for the success of future projects.

Economically, Seaside has been a resounding success in terms of real estate appreciation. Lots sold for as little as \$10,000 in the 1980s cannot be obtained for less than \$675,000 today. In fact, all of the existing residential lots have been sold and \$675,000 was the price of the last lot. Development on the remaining empty residential lots will conclude within the next 5 years. The obvious question becomes, where does Seaside go from there? In a little under 25 years, the development has ceased. Residential building may be soon finished but commercial development is only just beginning. Robert Davis and current town managers are planning a multi-million dollar renovation plan to the town infrastructure and downtown commercial regions. This tune-up should enhance the attraction of Seaside and ensure its legacy for at least another 25 years.

The problems originating from urban sprawl such as social segregation, pollution, expensive housing, and suburban emptiness cannot be remedied quickly or easily. New Urbanism and its ideals of diversity, complexity, and inclusivity, however, present a viable opportunity to slowly modify problematic, zoning policies and reverse growth trends stemming from post-World War II suburban growth. Hardly an effortless process, fixing the problems of urban sprawl requires nationwide cooperation and awareness among all groups of people especially political leaders. Robert Davis and the founders of the Congress for the New Urbanism are humbly confident that their urban design ideas

illustrated in such projects as Seaside, Florida will provoke careful consideration of New Urbanism principles for all future development projects.

Works Cited

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