

Paul Beyer, Director of Smart Growth
Governor's Smart Growth Cabinet
Albany, NY

AGE-INTEGRATED COMMUNITIES **Aging in Place**

Description:

Shifting demographics and changing housing and neighborhood preferences are transforming the real estate market in America. And, with the aging of the Baby Boomers, the influence of older persons on the housing market will increase dramatically and exponentially. The share of householders aged 55 – 64 is projected to grow to nearly 20 per cent by 2015, the share of traditional homebuyers (two parents with children) will dip below 25 per cent, and the number of people over age 65 will double from 2000 to 2030 to one out of every five people (70 million). As Dowell Myers,¹ Director of the Master's Program in Planning at the University of Southern California, noted, "The aging of the baby boom generation is remaking the residential landscape."

Generally, older adults—particularly empty-nesters and new retirees—are rejecting sprawl and demanding more compact, mixed-use, interesting, walkable, and vibrant communities. Having raised their children in the classic 'Ozzie-and-Harriet' bedroom communities of post-war America, older adults are looking for active, stimulating communities that accommodate their changing needs and lifestyles—recreational activities, walking and biking, cultural pursuits, hobbies, civic engagement, friends, and social activities. Many older Americans also want smaller, less expensive homes (apartments, condominiums, townhouses, and accessory units) that are accessible to people and neighborhood amenities; they no longer want to spend the time and money maintaining a large home and property, but they don't want to leave the communities in which they lived and raised their families. And, they more strongly value a community's sense of place.

Specifically, one neighborhood preference seems to have universal appeal: more older Americans want to walk, bike, or take public transit. Gas prices, the desire for exercise, independence, and social interaction, as well as driving restrictions, are leading them to seek alternative mobility options to the personal automobile. Patricia Salkin,² Director of the Government Law Center at the University at Albany, reported findings from two AARP studies: In 1996, half of the respondents over age 60 wanted to live within walking distance of food and retail stores, restaurants, drug stores, a doctor's office, and public transportation; in 2003, baby boomers reported wanting "a safe place to live as they age; to reside in close proximity to a hospital or doctor's office; nearby access to places of worship; and easy access to shopping centers, grocery stores, and drug stores." Older adults in general prefer places with access to walking and jogging trails, outdoor recreation, open space, public transportation, pools, and a variety of other public amenities.³

Appeal for all ages— Providing this type of community goes by many names: Smart Growth, sustainable development, livable communities, and Traditional

Neighborhood Development, among others. But one common denominator stands out: it has a growing market appeal among older Americans—and this appeal is mirrored among their children, the echo boomers, who are seeking the same types of housing and communities for many of the same reasons.

References:

¹ Dowell Myers and Elizabeth Gearin (June, 2001), "Current Preferences and Future Demand for Denser Residential Environments," *Housing Policy Debate*, Vol. 12, #4. Washington, DC: Fannie Mae Foundation.

http://www.knowledgeplex.org/kp/text_document_summary/scholarly_article/refiles/hpd_1204_myers.pdf.

^{2, 3} Patricia E. Salkin (Fall, 2003), *Where Will the Baby Boomers Go? Planning and Zoning for an Aging Population*. Albany, NY: Albany Law School, Government Law Center. http://www.governmentlaw.org/files/planning_zoning_for_aging.pdf.

Benefits:

For residents of all ages:

- **Physical health/increased exercise:** Compact, mixed-use, walkable communities provide greater opportunities for physical activity within the neighborhood. If neighborhood amenities—stores, parks, trails, health care, exercise facilities, libraries, post offices, banks—are located nearby, all residents (including older adults, children, and individuals with disabilities) have greater opportunities to walk, jog, bike, roller-blade, and exercise without relying on a long car ride, thus allowing exercise and physical activity to be a greater part of their daily routines.
- **Social interaction/mental health:** A great threat to the mental and emotional health of older adults and younger people with disabilities is social isolation, which often occurs when access and mobility relies heavily on the personal car and when socialization-enhancing features are not available. Communities that are walkable, mixed-use design, and diverse offer accessible public gathering spaces (such as parks, squares, shops, streetscapes, restaurants, community centers, sidewalks) and promote greater opportunities for daily interactions among community members of all ages, cultures, and incomes.
- **Lifestyle pursuits:** Following traditional retirement age, an increasing number of older adults continue to work full- or part-time in paid positions, or devote full- or part-time to civic engagement and other volunteer activities. Residents who are not working are searching for educational or other activities. Within the finite time of each day, baby boomers are striving to balance work, family, avocations, recreation, and fitness activities. For all these population groups, a well-designed community brings these opportunities within walking or short-transit distances.
- **Housing affordability:** Greater density can minimize the cost of housing by offering smaller, less expensive housing choices for older adults, people with

disabilities, single adults, and others. Denser development generally lowers the cost of land per unit; provides greater economies of scale, which lowers the costs of building materials; generates smaller, less expensive units; and typically requires less infrastructure and site-preparation costs. Greater density enables the development of condominiums, townhomes, apartments, duplexes, cottages, and small homes—all offering the type of housing many residents need and prefer.

For communities:

- **Public safety:** Communities that invite greater activity on the streets, in public gathering places, and at commercial and civic centers are generally more safe and comfortable—basically, activity in public spaces offers safety in numbers. The increased vigilance of the people on the streets (also known as “eyes-on-the-streets”) deters incidents of crime and increases the likelihood that any criminal activity will be detected—a proven crime deterrent. In addition, when buildings are arranged closer to one another and closer to the street, the direct line of vision from building to street promotes greater neighborhood oversight and vigilance.
- **Traffic relief:** When daily destinations are closer to one another and mixed together, the distance we must travel in our cars to accomplish daily tasks, and the number of car trips we take, will decrease; pedestrian-friendly streets, trails, and inter-connected roadways bolster this effect. By reducing overall dependence on car travel, communities can reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT), which relieves traffic volume on area roads and improves traffic safety.
- **Sense of place/sense of community:** A community’s sense of place is hard to define, yet easy to recognize; we know it when it’s there, and it is conspicuous when it is not. Well-planned community design can enhance that sense of place that we inherently feel in so many of our favorite places, and which creates within us a greater sense of community pride and identity. A sense of place provides emotional and mental benefits to residents, encourages people to enjoy their surroundings by engaging in public activity—walking, shopping, socializing, volunteering, working, recreating, reading on a park bench, or just plain people-watching—and encourages older adults, families, and people with disabilities to remain living in their communities instead of relocating to other states.

Impediments or barriers to development or implementation:

- **Local zoning:** Most communities were not zoned to accommodate compact, mixed-use, diverse, walkable communities with a range of housing options. Streets were not designed for walking or biking. Stores, parks, restaurants, civic buildings, and other daily amenities were isolated from one another and located far from residential neighborhoods. And, public transit became inaccessible or completely non-existent. Indeed, a recent AARP survey of Americans over age 50 tells the story: 40 per cent of respondents said they do not have adequate sidewalks in their neighborhoods; 44 per cent said they do not have accessible public transit; and nearly half (47 per cent) said they cannot

cross the main roads safely. AARP's Senior Vice President for Livable Communities, Elinor Ginzler, summed it up nicely: "More Americans aged 50+ are trying to leave their cars behind, but face obstacles as soon as they walk out the door, climb on their bikes, or head for the bus."⁴

- **Imbalance between supply and demand:** Market studies reveal that the supply of compact, walkable, mixed-use, inter-connected communities with safe, accessible public spaces—has fallen well behind the demand. These types of communities are too few and far-between to satisfy the current, and growing, demand from a cross-section of community residents, including aging baby boomers. Even developers acknowledge the unsatisfied demand for alternatives to conventional, low-density, auto-dominated suburban development patterns. In a nationwide survey⁵ of developers, three-quarters of respondents saw at least a 10 per cent market for such alternatives, and one-third saw a market of 25 per cent. A majority of developers believed that ". . . current supplies of alternative development were inadequate relative to market interest."
- **Public opposition and misperceptions:** Many residents hold negative impressions—indeed, downright fear—of density, mixed-use development and multifamily housing. Some of these perceptions are based on negative associations with urban life, such as crime, low air quality, and lack of space. Communities and municipalities can effectively counter these myths, misperceptions, and fears with rational arguments, facts, diagrams, pictures . . . and a lot of patience.
- **Developer resistance:** Some developers may be resistant to alternatives to the type of development they have provided for decades and with which they are far more familiar. Or they may not be inclined to pursue compact, mixed-use, walkable development due to the anticipated local opposition by residents and town officials. Local governments and community groups can help bring developers along by fostering—and even facilitating—communication between developers and residents; providing hard market data on the benefits of compact, mixed-use housing for various population groups; developing supportive public policies and incentives for such development; addressing public opposition with effective public education and media advocacy on the benefits of alternatives to sprawl; organizing older adults and others who will benefit from smart, sustainable development; and appealing to developer pride by extolling the benefits of good development to the community and its quality-of-life.

References:

⁴ Nancy Thompson (August 13, 2008), "AARP Poll: Fighting Gas Prices, Nearly A Third of Americans Age 50+ Hang Up Their Keys To Walk But Find Streets Inhospitable, Public Transportation Inaccessible," *AARP.org*. Washington, DC: AARP.

http://www.aarp.org/about-aarp/press-center/info-08-2008/aarp_poll_fighting_gas_prices_nearly_a_third_of_am.html.

⁵Jonathan Levine (October 18, 2005), *Zoned Out: Regulation, Markets, and Choices in Transportation and Metropolitan Land Use*. Washington, DC: RFF Press.

Resource—examples:

- Manal J. Aboelata, et al. (July, 2004), *The Built Environment and Health: 11 Profiles of Neighborhood Transformation*—describes 11 case studies in communities where local residents mobilized public and private resources to make changes in their physical environments to improve the health and quality of life for their citizens, including building a jogging path around a cemetery, transforming vacant lots into community gardens, reducing the prevalence of nuisance liquor stores, walkability in a commercial district, improvements for walking and biking, and traffic calming. Oakland, California: Prevention Institute. The Institute's focus is to use a prevention approach to create strategies that change the conditions that impact community health—by drawing on all the necessary stakeholders in order to ensure that prevention efforts are systematic and comprehensive, and by linking practices from public health, education, urban planning, social work, and other fields.
http://www.preventioninstitute.org/index.php?option=com_jlibrary&view=article&id=114&Itemid=127. Also, www.preventioninstitute.org
- *Active Living by Design (ALBD): Increasing Physical Activity and Healthy Eating Through Community Design*—ALBD's focus is on creating community-led change by working with local and national partners to build a culture of active living and healthy eating—where routine physical activity and healthy eating are accessible, easy, and affordable to everyone; established by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and located in the North Carolina Institute for Public Health, University of North Carolina Gillings School of Global Public Health, Chapel Hill, North Carolina. www.activelivingbydesign.org.
 - Case studies: <http://www.activelivingbydesign.org/our-approach/albd-case-studies>.
 - Case studies: <http://www.activelivingbydesign.org/our-approach/hebd-case-studies>.
 - Information about (including case examples) ALBD's five “P” strategies: preparation, promotion, programs, policy, and physical projects—strategies that represent a comprehensive approach to increasing physical activity in a community: <http://www.activelivingbydesign.org/our-approach/5p-strategies-tactics>.
 - Local Government Commission—*Designs and Codes that reduce Crime Around Multi-Family Housing*: reviews work by a number of local agencies that have converted anti-crime design concepts into local codes and guidelines for new development and redevelopment: www.activelivingbydesign.org/events-resources/resources/designs-and-codes-reduce-crime-around-multifamily-housing. Also includes a four-page fact sheet that summarizes research and provides case study examples of how design and local codes can reduce crime around multifamily housing: <http://www.activelivingbydesign.org/category/resource-type/fact-sheet>.

- The Town of Redding, CT, received the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency's Smart Growth Achievement Award (which distinguishes exceptional approaches to development that benefits the economy, public health, and the environment) for "the Georgetown Land Development Company project at the former Gilbert & Bennett Wire Mill. This successful four-year effort brought together a private developer, local and state government, and extensive public participation throughout the entire inclusive planning process; and the result of this collaborative effort is a remarkable New England village and a new model for developments nationwide." For more information about the Redding project: http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/awards/sg_awards_publication_2005.htm; Under "2005 Award Winners," scroll down and click on "Small Communities."
- *National Award for Smart Growth Achievement*—U. S. Environmental Protection Agency: descriptions of the 2009 award winning projects, as well as links to previous winning projects: <http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/awards.htm>.

Resource—written and web:

- Matthew Greenwald and Associates, Inc. (May, 2003), *These Four Walls . . . Americans 45+ Talk About Home and Community*. Washington, DC: AARP. http://assets.aarp.org/rqcenter/il/four_walls.pdf.
- Virginia Lee, et al. (2008), *Promising Strategies for Creating Healthy Eating and Active Living Environments*—a comprehensive and cross-cutting review of policy, strategy, and program recommendations to create healthy eating and active living environments. Healthy Eating Active Living Convergence Partnership (California Endowment, Kaiser Permanente, Nemours, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). http://www.convergencepartnership.org/atf/cf/%7B245A9B44-6DED-4ABD-A392-AE583809E350%7D/CP_Promising%20Strategies_printed.pdf.
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http://www.des.ucdavis.edu/faculty/handy/Handy_NIEHS_revised.pdf.
- *Shape Up America—healthy weight for life*: www.shapeup.org.
- *Active Living by Design—increasing physical activity and healthy eating through community design*: www.activelivingbydesign.org.
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