

Neighbors and Neighborhoods, from Olmsted to Jacobs.¹

Sidney Brower
sbrower@umd.edu

Jane Jacobs's singular contribution to neighborhood planning is that she moved planners from unquestioning acceptance of the village model of earlier planners (such as Frederick Law Olmsted, Clarence Perry, and Clarence Stein) to accepting a model based on a clear-eyed look at conditions in an urban neighborhood. Each model is a prescription for neighborhood design: The village model, as defined by Olmsted, calls for low density housing, a separation of uses, and quiet tree-lined roads; while Jacobs's urban model calls for high density housing, mixed uses, and active, lively streets.

In this presentation, I will suggest that both models have a serious flaw: While they *prescribe* the physical characteristics of the neighborhood, they make *assumptions* about who the residents will be and how they will behave. For example, Olmsted, in his plan for Riverside, assumes a homogeneous community of "people of taste," with similar lifestyles, backgrounds, and interests. Jacobs, on the other hand, assumes diverse residents, who are engaged with one another, agree on behavioral norms, keep an eye on the street, and help one another.

But what if these assumptions are unfounded, as they often are in real-world situations? As planners, we all know neighborhoods where residents are too private, or apathetic, disorganized, divided, or fearful, to interact and work together as a community, where public spaces are not cared for and allowed to deteriorate, and where residents feel that policing the streets is someone else's responsibility. The success of a plan ultimately depends on the relationships among people not buildings, and it seems to me that rather than assuming these relationships, we, as planners, should plan for them. Community should be a subject rather than a consequence of planning, and we should see ourselves as community planners rather than neighborhood designers.

In my book, *Neighbors and Neighborhoods* (APA Planners Press, 2011), I review the history of about twenty once-planned developments, some conventional and some less so, spanning over 130 years. I find that in each of these developments, there are plans for creating a physical place, and there are plans for bringing residents together as a community. While the former plans are developed by professional planners, the latter are almost always introduced by developers, administrators, real estate agents, promoters, or community organizers. So, in a sense, *they*, rather than the professional planners, are the community planners.

I will use four developments described in the book, to illustrate planning principles represented in these community plans. The developments are: Carmel-by-the-Sea,

¹ Presented at the 2011 Annual Conference of the PA Chapter of APA, Scranton PA, October 2011.

California; Radburn, New Jersey; Santa Fe, New Mexico; and the Twin Oaks Community, Virginia.

1. Carmel-by-the-Sea.

In 1900, James Franklin Devendorf, a real estate developer, bought a piece of land on the Monterey Peninsula in California. He wanted to create a community of “people of aesthetic...taste,” who would respect and enhance the natural beauty of the site. He sent a letter to “the School Teachers of California and other Brain Workers at Indoor Employment” offering them land at bargain prices, with low down payment and low monthly installments. In 1905, the president and a number of faculty members of Stanford University bought lots and built houses there. Devendorf provided land, rent-free, for an outdoor theater, and later sold the land to the community at a bargain price. Playwrights, and poets were attracted to Carmel; they documented its natural beauty and wrote original plays, and members of the community participated in the productions.

Spurred by Devendorf’s actions, Carmel developed as a community of eccentric, artistic people. It has been called: “a town that cultivates eccentricity like a rare organic tomato.” It became known for its quaint houses, which have no street numbers, but names like “Tinkerbelle;” or people give an address such as “the second house southwest of Seventh and Camino Real.” Residents do not have door-to-door mail delivery, choosing instead to pick up their mail at the post office, which serves as a social meeting place. As a nod to its uneven street and sidewalk surfaces, the town passed a “high heels” ordinance in the 1920s that requires a permit to wear shoes with heels higher than two inches and with less than one square inch of bearing surface.

In summary, Devendorf initiated the process of creating community by attracting people who shared the same values, and who were likely to cooperate and work together. He did this by means of advertising and incentive pricing, and by creating an environment that would attract his target population and discourage others. One could say, then, that Devendorf’s plan was to *attract people who were predisposed to getting along with one another.*

2. Radburn, New Jersey, 1929

Radburn was built by the City Housing Corporation as the first of (what was intended to be) a series of garden cities in the United States. The Corporation made a systematic attempt to "create an efficient method of community production that would promote both family and friendship." The Radburn Plan, with its superblocks and continuous park system, is well known. Less well known is the fact that the Corporation set up the Radburn Association, supported by annual fees paid by all residents, with the function, among others, of holding in trust and programming all of the parkland and the community facilities which, in the early 1930s, included swimming pools, tennis courts, basketball courts, and an archery plaza.

This encouraged the residents to form the Radburn Citizens' Association that would provide an open forum for discussing questions of community interest, to exchange information about community activities, to give residents a voice in dealing with the development company, and to foster the organization of various clubs for education, entertainment, and athletics.

Most residents participated in one or more of these organized activities, which led Robert Hudson, who was, in 1934, the assistant to the manager for community activities, to write, " [The community was so] thoroughly planned in all its social and other functions that there is scarcely any work left for the church, except in the field of spiritual welfare," and that "it is indeed an unusual person or family that does not grow in community mindedness in such an environment."

In summary, the City Housing Corporation set up a community organization with the appropriate authority, means, and facilities to operate programs. The organization provided reasons and opportunities for people to come together and to identify and work on matters of common interest. One could say, then, that the Corporation's plan was to *set up a community organization that would serve as a vehicle for collective action.*

3. Santa Fe, New Mexico

In 1880, the railroad bypassed Santa Fe, New Mexico, and the local economy began to decline. The city government decided to market the image of Santa Fe as a distinctive, historic town, combining indigenous Indian and Spanish-style architecture. They recommended that no building permits be issued "until proper assurance is given that the architecture will conform with the Santa Fe style." The problem was that there was no clear Santa Fe style.

In 1916, work began on the construction of a new fine arts museum, whose design combined elements from mission churches and Pueblo villages. The Museum served as an exemplar of the Santa Fe style. Architects began to experiment with the new idiom; home interiors were furnished with Navajo blankets, Pueblo pottery, and New Mexico Mission-style furniture. Streets that had been named Grant, Manhattan, and Railroad were renamed Paseo Coronado, Paseo Castañada, and Camino De Vargas. The chamber of commerce promoted Santa Fe as the "City Different." In 1957, the city adopted an ordinance requiring that all buildings conform to the Old Santa Fe Style."

Almost yearly since 1911, the town holds a fiesta celebrating the town's colorful history. The fiesta ignores the historical relations between of the Spanish, Native American and American populations, which were anything but friendly, and presents instead the image of a united, multi-cultural community. Although initiated in 1911, the fiesta was promoted as a community tradition going back to 1712 when the Spanish governor, Diego de Vargas, celebrated his reconquest of Santa Fe from the Indians

In summary, the city of Santa Fe introduced a design theme that built on a common history, and that served as the basis for a collective identity, an identity that was validated

through annual events, festivals, and parades. One could say, then, that the City's plan was to *create a setting and recurring events that reflect a collective identity, and remind residents of what they have in common.*

Twin Oaks Community, Louisa, Virginia, 1967

Twin Oaks Community is located on a 450-acre farm about thirty-five miles southeast of Charlottesville. It is a cooperative society that places priority on communal living, respect for nature, peaceful coexistence, and finding human-scale solutions to the problems of land use, food production, energy conservation, and appropriate use of technology. The community is run by members through an elected board and managers, whose decisions are guided by the members acting as a whole.

Members live together in residence buildings and eat in communal dining rooms. Each member is required to work a certain number of hours each week for the community. They receive no payment for their work other than a small amount of pocket money. In return, the community provides for the basic needs of its members, including health care and education.

Almost everything in the community belongs to the collective. Members use communally owned cars, vans, and bicycles, and they get clothing from a common pool. They participate in all decisions that affect the community and in a wide range of activities, including celebrating each change of season and the anniversary of their founding. They also host special events that serve outsiders, including regular tours and an annual Communities Conference.

In summary, the Twin Oaks Community has created an environment in which residents have a high degree of interdependency. Cooperative and cohousing communities and condominium associations are less extreme examples of developments where individual residents stand to benefit or lose from the overall appearance, management, and programming of the whole. One could say, then, that the community's plan was to *create conditions under which individual residents would benefit from the success and lose from the failure of the collective.*

My point in this presentation has been to suggest that successful neighborhoods depend heavily on something that is hardly ever included in our neighborhood plans—the creation of community. Our plans often include facilities and site layouts that facilitate social interaction, but interaction does not necessarily result in community; it can accentuate differences as well as commonalities, and spark conflict as well as cooperation. Community-building programs that identify and build on common interests, reduce residents' perceptions of difference, and mediate to resolve misunderstandings and conflicts, can help to make our assumptions of community, a reality.

Olmsted's village model and Jacobs's urban model are both valuable concepts, but both ignore the need to plan for community.