

NEW URBAN NEWS

COVERING DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN-SCALE NEIGHBORHOODS

VOLUME 15 • NUMBER 5

JULY • AUGUST 2010

Public health: the next driver of planning decisions?

"Health impact assessments," a new tool for decision-makers, may strengthen the hand of urbanists.

PHILIP LANGDON

Over the past several years, health experts have become increasingly convinced of the benefits of compact community design. Study after study has shown that when places are designed to make walking a normal part of daily life, people tend to become more physically active and more socially engaged — which is good for their well-being.

Now the nation's health professionals are taking this awareness to a new level. They are beginning to encourage government agencies to conduct "health impact assessments" (HIAs) — using them to guide land use, transportation, and other decisions. If HIAs flourish, they could provide a strong base of support for new urbanist place-making.

During CNU's 18th annual congress in Atlanta in May, health impact assessments repeatedly came in for discussion. Dr. Richard Jackson, formerly of the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and now a professor in the UCLA School of Public Health, described HIAs as "the cutting edge of a brand-new wave in public health."

"I feel it's absolutely essential," Jackson said. "In three years, it will be normative to do health impact assessments."

Health impact assessments — in particular, studies of land use and transportation planning decisions' effects on public health — have been conducted in Europe and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

Organized cycling to school in Decatur, Georgia.



PHOTO COURTESY OF DECATUR DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

CA developers fight weakening of greenhouse gas laws

Meanwhile, the state's urban developers are looking to create TOD projects along a future 70-mile passenger rail line.

Despite spirited talk in California about a "transportation revolution," developers there complain that funds for transit-oriented development (TOD) are in short supply. To improve the outlook, smart-growth-oriented developers are forming a new organization — the California Infill Builders Association — which will advocate infill development and seek more plentiful financing.

"Most lenders just don't get it — the added value of transit," says Michael Dieden, who chairs the infill builders group and also heads Creative Housing Associates, a Los Angeles firm that developed the well-received Mission

CONTINUED ON PAGE 9

INSIDE

New Urban Network, PAGE 2

Affordability and affluence, PAGE 3

Arterials cost lives, PAGES 4-5

Ride transit, lose weight, PAGE 4

Slow charrette, PAGE 5

Health impact assessments, PAGE 6

Healthy development tool, PAGE 7

The bad and the good of hospital plans, PAGES 8-9

Ventura code building, PAGE 11

Bristol to redevelop, PAGES 11-12

Book reviews, PAGES 12-14

Departments, PAGES 14-17, 20

CNU Update, PAGES 18-19

health organizations in other cities, such as Bon Secours Health System in Richmond, Virginia, are beginning to do. In early June, Bon Secours teamed up with the City of Richmond and its Redevelopment & Housing Authority to sponsor a charrette in Church Hill, a neighborhood where the Bon Secours Richmond Community Hospital is the largest employer.

The charrette, involving University of Miami Architecture Dean Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, architecture professor Joanna Lombard, and Duany Plater-Zyberk & Co., was meant to explore “how a critically important corridor (Nine Mile Road and 25th Street) could be revitalized to strengthen a neighborhood,” according to Dougal Hewitt, senior vice president of Bon Secours.

This was latest of a series of charrettes Bon Secours has held, looking to fit its facilities into city or suburban settings in ways that create an appealing overall environment. In January 2009, Bon Secours had Plater-Zyberk lead a charrette to guide the growth of its five-year-old St. Francis Hospital in suburban Midlothian, Virginia. The St. Francis plan calls for building a new medical office building in a way that reinforces the main street.

In November 2009, Bon Secours had Andres Duany lead a charrette on future development of its St. Mary’s Hospital campus in Richmond’s West End. “The town center concept is a theme in each of the charrettes,” Hewitt said. Bon Secours has embraced techniques such as using liner buildings to cloak parking structures.

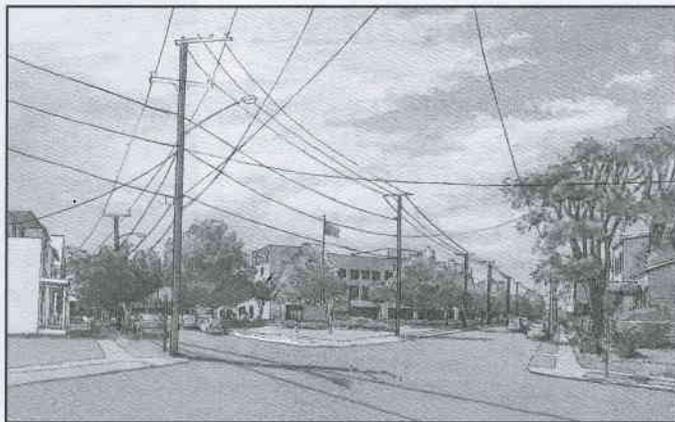
The recent charrette in Church Hill came up with ideas such as:

- Continuing infill retail development, which would benefit from recent sidewalk and lighting improvements. New buildings would aim to create more consistent street-walls and in some instances define court-like spaces.
- Bolstering the juncture of 25th Street and Nine Mile Road with a library expansion, a new grocery store, and construction of a traffic circle. Funding is in place for the roundabout, one of the first visible results to come from the charrette.
- Façade and other building improvements for the hospital.
- Creating gardens, to act on interest in urban farming.
- Enhancing public housing by creating private spaces for residents and adding streets connecting the housing with the surrounding community. ♦

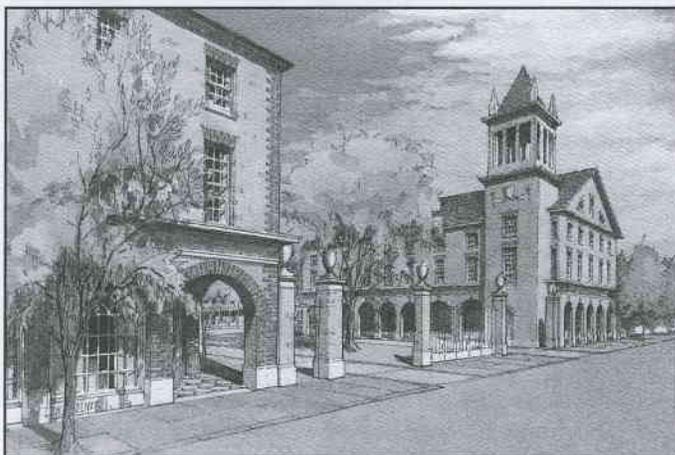
Tower of St. Francis Hospital in Midlothian, Virginia



PHOTO BY DAVID EVERETTE



Existing street view of Richmond Community Hospital, above, and ultimate proposed expansion.



RENDERINGS COURTESY OF DUANY, PLATER-ZYBERK & COMPANY

CA infill developers

FROM PAGE 1

Meridian mixed-use project in South Pasadena.

The infill builders group will attempt to make California friendlier to compact development, including fighting the watering down of climate and land-use laws.

• The association intends to battle for implementation of California Senate Bill 375, which aims to cut greenhouse gas emissions and provide financial incentives for smart growth. The legislation, adopted in September 2008 (see Oct. 2008 *New Urban News*), mandates that major regional transportation planning agencies draw up plans by September 30, 2010, telling how each region will meet specific greenhouse gas reduction targets. State transportation funds can then be used to support development in infill and transit-oriented locations.

• The association expects to join this fall in a campaign to “stop the oil companies from hijacking” Assembly Bill 32 — legislation aimed at reducing greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by 2020. Oil companies are pushing to suspend implementation of the law, claiming it will hurt the state’s economy. A referendum is scheduled for November.

• Dieden is working with Ramin Kolahi, principal in Lighthouse Investments LLC, a Los Angeles-based real estate investment and development firm, on preliminary planning to establish a “California TOD Fund,” which would supply capital to developers interested in producing high-quality transit-oriented

developments. "We're talking about a \$100 million fund," Dieden says, contending that this kind of investment should appeal to "new, younger, enlightened capitalist types."

NEW RAIL LINE IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

Some future TOD opportunities will be along a 70-mile passenger rail line that will be put into operation north of San Francisco, running from Larkspur in Marin County to Cloverdale in Sonoma County. Fourteen stations will serve what's being called the Sonoma Marin Area Rapid Transit, or SMART. Trains will stop in population and job centers such as San Rafael, Novato, Petaluma, Cotati, Rohnert Park, Santa Rosa, Windsor, and Healdsburg.

The line, with a parallel bicycle and pedestrian path, is to begin construction in 2012 on a route that has provided freight service — irregularly — during the past decade. It should start carrying passengers in 2014, and will be the backbone of a system connecting with existing transit systems, such as buses and ferries.

SMART will give travelers an alternative to Highway 101, currently the main transportation route through the area. The bulk of the estimated \$590 million cost of SMART is to be paid for by a quarter-cent sales tax increase that Marin and Sonoma voters approved in 2008.

One of the most ambitious TOD projects being planned for that route is New Railroad Square, an approximately \$250 million development that Creative Housing Associates, Railroad Square Associates, and Equity Community Builders are jointly preparing for a 5.3-acre brownfield site in Santa Rosa. Dan Solomon of WRT/Solomon E.T.C. in San Francisco produced a concept design for the land, near a former railroad depot, and will design the buildings.

Solomon's design shows a tall, three-story set of curving buildings forming a crescent around a public plaza next to the tracks. The plaza is to be anchored by retail, a public market, and restaurants. A major sports club operator, Club One, is interested in installing two swimming pools and a full-size basketball court in a 52,000 sq. ft. historic building. Above the club would be 68 affordable housing units.

"It's taking fragments of an old Del Monte tomato canning facility and



Dan Solomon's design for New Railroad Square, Santa Rosa

giving it a contemporary application," Dieden says of the project. New Railroad Square is to have about 200 for-sale houses. Because the for-sale housing market is currently depressed, that component will be built in a later phase.

Railroad Square Associates is headed by John Stewart, an affordable housing developer. Equity Community Builders, led by John Clawson, is expert in public finance.

Another important project is expected to be developed near the North Santa Rosa rail stop. In June the SMART Board of Directors decided to place that station close to the Coddington Mall, making it likely that the 1960s mall will be diversified into a town center. Geof Syphers of Coddington Enterprises, part-owner of

the mall, says his firm is working the new urbanist firm Fisher Town Design on plans. The mall site already contains a bus transit hub, post office, library, government offices, and a Whole Foods store in addition to other retail.

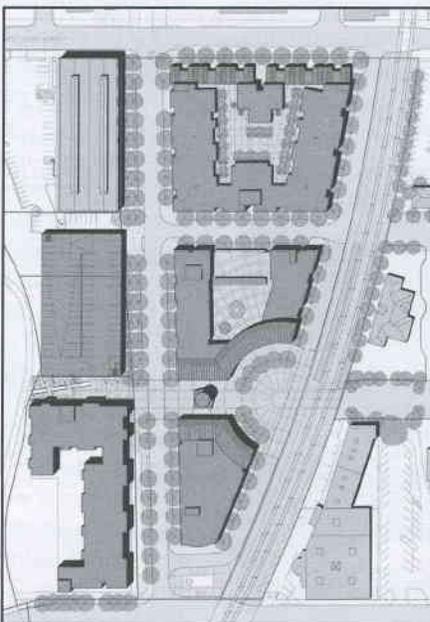
SUCCESS IN S. PASADENA

The market for well-designed and well-placed TOD is promising, if Dieden's Mission Meridian Village is a fair representative. A Coldwell Banker study in 2009 found that Mission Meridian has continually outperformed competing properties in South Pasadena.

Mission Meridian is a 67-unit project with retail space designed by Moule & Polyzoides for a 1-acre site just a short walk from a Gold Line rail stop. When Mission Meridian opened in 2005, it was priced 3.3 percent lower than competing projects per square foot, in part because "it was a new and untested concept," according to Dominic and Hem-Young de Fazio of Coldwell Banker's office in San Marino. After 2005, said the researchers, "Mission Meridian Village surpassed all other resale units in each year" from 2006 to 2009. The margin by which it outperformed other South Pasadena real estate ranged from 12.4 percent in 2006, the first year during which resales took place, to 26 percent in 2009.

Mission Meridian prices climbed from \$377 per square foot in 2005 to \$416 in 2009, while competing properties dropped from \$396 to \$330 per square foot, according to Coldwell Banker. Over that period, Mission Meridian's prices rose 10.35 percent despite the national real estate slump, while other South Pasadena properties fell 16.67 percent. ♦

Plan for New Railroad Square



COURTESY OF CREATIVE HOUSING ASSOCIATES