

CASE STUDY

GREAT PARKS AND GREAT STREETS CAN SPUR REDEVELOPMENT

This study is based upon material presented in the following publications.

1. Mark L. Gillem. "Priming the Pump-Downtown Parks can drive redevelopment." Eugene Weekly. January 24, 2008.
2. Mark Hinshaw, FAICP. "Great Neighborhoods." Planning. January, 2008.
3. Ruth Knack, AICP. "Great Streets." Planning, 2008.

The American Planning Association established its Great Places in America awards program in 2007 to recognize the great neighborhoods and great streets in America. Applications responded to the following criteria to explain how their nomination complied. To be considered great neighborhood, each nomination had to:

1. Have a variety of functional attributes that contribute to the day to day living of residents (residential, commercial, or mixed use).
2. Accommodate multimodal transportation (pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers).
3. Have design and special architectural features that are visually interesting.
4. Encourage human contact and social activities.
5. Promote community involvement and maintain a secure environment.
6. Promote sustainability and respond to climatic demands.
7. Have a memorable character.



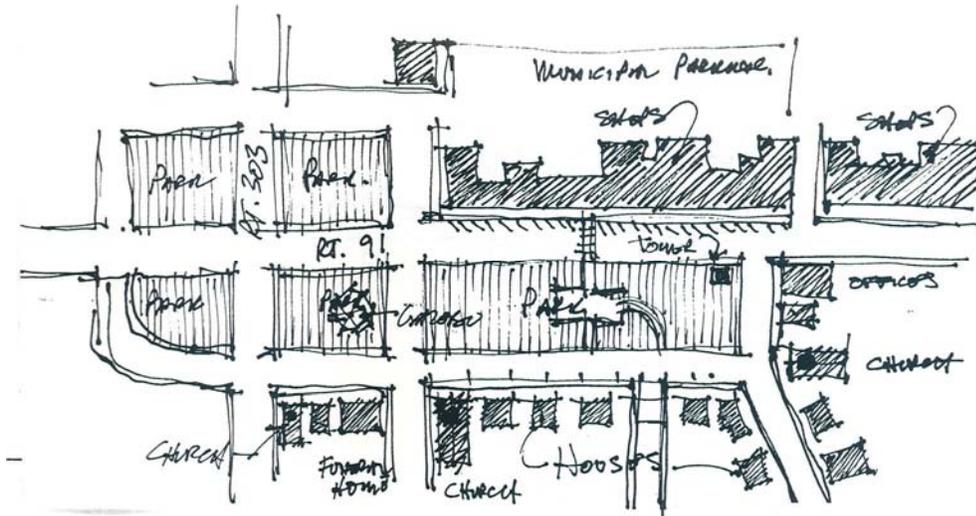
Goodale Park, Columbus, Ohio

Great parks can, in and of themselves, address each of the criteria, and it is interesting that most of the winning neighborhoods included at least one public spot where people spend time. Several of these were parks.



In an article in the Eugene Weekly, entitled *Priming The Pump*, architect and planner Mark Gillem reports that “Urban parks attract economic development, increase the desirability of living downtown, and enhance environmental sustainability.” Mark is a Professor of Architecture and Landscape Architecture at the University of Oregon, and he is very interested in the role that parks play in urban centers. He and his students completed an extensive urban park study involving parks in Vancouver, Corvallis, Beaverton, Portland, and

Albany, conducting more than 100 interviews and learning from 200 hours of observation. They concluded that parks are equally important in small cities, and large, if there is interest in attracting new housing, new businesses, and tourism to the town center areas.



The students concluded that great parks should be located in the heart of downtown, and they should be open to a variety of uses, and surrounded with residential buildings and shops. They should be shaded by tremendous trees, bordered by streets with parking, and maintained by the City. Hudson Ohio serves as a small town example, with shops along one bordering street, and houses along the opposite bordering street.



Urban parks attract economic development, because they attract visitors and businesses. Developers know this, which is why they provide parks within their own developments. This is a photo from a retail development in East Cleveland called Legacy.



Urban parks are attractive for new residents interested in living in urban locations. These ground floor retail uses and the housing units above are located across the street from Victor Steinbrueck Park in Seattle.



Urban parks enhance the environment's sustainability. It is reported that, depending upon size, one tree can absorb up to 70 pounds of carbon dioxide in a year's time, plus approximately 10 additional pounds of other air pollutants. In addition, a canopy of large trees can absorb hundreds of gallons of rainfall, greatly reducing storm runoff.

Building at higher housing densities allows open space which can be made accessible for public use. Density and open space must be provided together.

Great Streets have many things in common, but each is different with its own personality.





Broad Street, Columbus, O.

The American Planning Association recognized ten Great Streets as part of its 2007 Great Places in America awards program. Each of the honored streets was different, but they shared the common ground of exhibiting good planning. The program considered such factors as maintenance, safety, and sustainability. Great streets may feature important architecture or significant natural areas. Connectivity is an important aspect of planning great streets, how they link up with the thoroughfare network. Great streets may be defined by great trees, or by frontage shops, or they may incorporate traffic calming or special design aspects in and of themselves. Whatever the specific configuration, all great streets are memorable. They contribute greatly to the sense of place within a community.



Great streets do not need to be super-sized to be great. The Harrison Plat in Columbus' Victorian Village area serves as an example of how creative planning of neighborhood streets can achieve great civic value. Small roundabouts within the neighborhood punctuate intersections, calm traffic, and establish a strong sense of place.



Great streets can be shaped by great trees, as in the top photo of South Columbia Avenue in Bexley, or they may be defined by other forms of landscaping, as in this view along Outer Circle Road, Regent Park, London. In each case, the natural landscape lends immeasurable character to the street.

Planning great streets involves much more, however, and the list of considerations is extensive. A few of the important issues are listed below.

1. How will the street address the need to balance automobile parking, loading zones and transit stops? Will there be provision for bicycles, scooters, and perhaps even segways?



2. Will the street focus on retail or mixed use development? If so, how will the street facilitate the social activities of shopping, and at the same time allow continuous pedestrian movement?



3. Will the design of the street provide a memorable character?



4. Will the street be designed to provide a sense of safety for pedestrians?



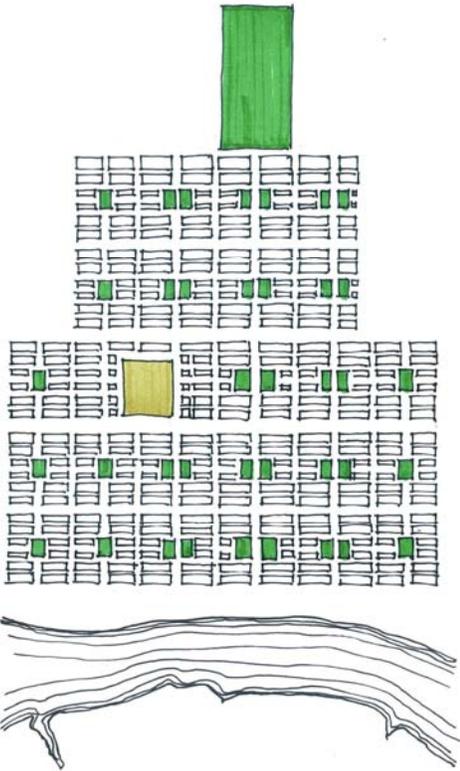
5. The character of streets often changes along their entire length. This is also often true about the key function that each street must achieve. One of the key features of each street, however, is its connectivity. How does it link up with the entire network of streets? Does it lead anywhere?



The plan of the old quarter of Savannah is perhaps the best example of how great streets and great parks can combine to establish an extraordinary urban pattern, one that remains unique in its overall sense of place. In 1732, James Oglethorpe laid out an array of squares with parks at their center, in grid fashion, with streets running from the north, perpendicular to the Savannah River, through the center of each square and its central park. A grid of east and west streets was laid over all to separate the squares, which were called wards. The parks were 315 feet by 270 feet in size. The streets running north and south were given a right of way of 75 feet in width, and the right of way for east and west streets was set at 37 ½ feet. Lanes of 22 ½ feet in width were located on center with each park, and were planned to run east and west serving the service functions of alleys behind the residential lots.

Today there are 26 wards, and the original pattern is broken only once to accommodate a cemetery. Oglethorpe had apparently not expected the town to grow so large to encompass the cemetery, which had been located outside the bounds of anticipated expansion. Buildings three stories in height surround each park within its ward, and the overall scale town is charming and very residential in character. The quarter mixes density and open space in a very magical way.

The primary street running north and south is Bull Street. It carries mixed use zoning, and connects five of Savannah's most historic parks, from the river's edge to Forsyth Park on the north edge of the old quarter. Bull Street also runs through SCAD (the Savannah College of Art and Design), its campus being the fabric of the City. Bull Street is a great street, and the parks are great parks.





Views of Bull Street, Savannah, Georgia



One of the parks along Bull Street, Savannah, Georgia



One of the parks along Bull Street, Savannah, Georgia (above) and Forsyth Park, Savannah, Georgia.