



Something For Everyone

By Barbara Ballinger

Before suburban sprawl burgeoned after World War II, homogenized the landscape and separated houses more from one another, homeowners were used to mingling freely with neighbors, living amid a mix of housing styles and sizes and walking rather than just driving.

What's old has become new – and in vogue – again. Much of the credit goes to developers and architects designing Traditional Neighborhood Developments and an organization helping to promote them, Congress for the New Urbanism (www.cnu.org).

Some credit one firm in particular with putting TNDs on the map – the architecture firm Duany Plater-Zyberk, which developed the resort community of Seaside on the Florida Panhandle in 1980. When it first emerged, the master plan seemed novel yet it also recalled older walkable areas, such as New Orleans' French Quarter. At Seaside, houses were placed close to streets and sidewalks, front porches were an architectural icon and way to encourage neighborliness, and shops were an easy walk or bike ride away rather than a drive. Seaside's popularity spawned similar infill and brand new communities nationwide, and for year-round rather than just vacation living.

Whether small or large, TNDs included other common denominators – a mix of housing types from apartments to condos, townhouses and single-family homes, commercial and retail outlets and shared greenery, say John Norquist, president of Chicago-based CNU.

Popularity has continued to increase due to many homeowners preferring that their homes be integrated into a neighborhood rather than isolated, have that mix of housing types, be close to a street with the entrance facing it and have a garage or parking space face an alley (rather than the front), according to a recent report by the University of Illinois at Chicago, published in the Journal of the American Planning Association.

“People like to get to know their neighbors better than they usually can in a segregated subdivision,” says Steve Maun, president of LeylandAlliance LLC, a Tuxedo Park, N.Y.-based developer that has worked on TNDs for the last decade, including Hammond's Ferry, a public-private venture on the Savannah River in North Augusta, S.C.

Evolving Concept

As TNDs have sprouted the concept has evolved. Many communities display an authentic look appropriate for the site and the region rather than cookie-cutter sameness. At Chesterfield Downs in Burlington County, N.J., builders have looked to surrounding villages for ideas about the area's 19th-century architecture. “A lot have porches, shutters and a Colonial look. We're meticulous

about what can be built,” says Glenn Ward, vice president of sales and marketing for The Matzel and Mumford Organization, one of three builders working on the project. At Plum Creek in Kyle, Texas, near Austin, many of the low-slung bungalows or two-story homes reflect the vernacular architecture of old central Texas with hardiplank siding to imitate clapboard. Colors add diversity, says Peter French, project manager for Plum Creek Development Partners, which is now in its second phase at Plum Creek.

Sustainability has gained a bigger foothold, with houses built close to retail and offices and sometimes with some green materials and energy-efficient systems and appliances, which cause no loss in livability, says Maun. An effort is also made to save trees where possible, plant new ones and select native vegetation. At Plum Creek, 5,000 trees were planted. Many TND streets and paths are also linked to systems beyond the neighborhood’s boundaries.

CNU is encouraging sustainability by partnering with the U.S. Green Building Council and the Natural Resource Defense Council in a joint venture known as LEED for Neighborhood Development, which is a system for rating and certifying green neighborhoods.

Focus on the Economy

Yet another TND trend is the inclusion of some type of mass transportation stop when feasible, giving rise to another acronym – Transit-Oriented Developments, or TODs, so residents can drive less. Plum Creek, <20 minutes> from Austin, for instance, expects to have a stop on the proposed Austin-San Antonio commuter rail line, according to French.

Some TNDs also are beginning to include more affordable and even low-income housing, which helps to add architectural diversity, plus a diversity of residents for a more dynamic mix, says Mark Meyer, ASLA, LEED-AP, a landscape architect with TBG Partners’ Dallas/Fort Worth office, which has worked on many projects, such as Plum Creek. Some homes at Plum Creek are in the \$140,000 range, with the highest at \$350,000.

“Too often in the past TNDs were expensive and you had to be able to spend \$500,000 to get in. The principles of a true TND are that it offers housing from the lowest to highest economic level with the focus on quality rather than size. Each house also gives a gift to the street – maybe a porch or a bay window,” Meyer says.

Maun predicts only an increase in TNDs, driven in part by demographics of the Baby Boomers and Millennials, 20- to 29-year-olds. “They’re the two largest segments and both are trending toward living in cities or town centers rather than distant suburbs. They like that these designs offer everything. I think it’s a wise real-estate investment to purchase in one of these neighborhoods rather than in an isolated suburb,” he says. “And they’re places where people can stay put or move up to a larger home or apartment or downsize to a smaller, less costly one.” Something for everyone.