AARP Public Policy Institute

Opportunities for Creating Livable Communities

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Research Report

AARP

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by
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AARP's Public Policy Institute informs and stimulates public debate on the issues we face as we age. Through research, analysis and dialogue with the nation's leading experts, PPI promotes development of sound, creative policies to address our common need for economic security, health care, and quality of life.

The views expressed herein are for information, debate, and discussion, and do not necessarily represent official policies of AARP.

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Foreword

This paper provides a framework for understanding the most common barriers to implementing livable communities. More importantly, it offers several examples from around the country where communities have overcome one or more barriers to realize increased livability for older adults and other community members.

A livable community is one that has affordable and appropriate housing, adequate mobility options, and supportive community features. Together, these allow an older person a level of independence and an opportunity to engage in community life.

There is increasing recognition by AARP and other aging advocates and researchers that many of the solutions for successful aging will arise through multi-faceted local planning and decision-making—be it land development planning, zoning, transportation planning, road design, or housing policy. Each element of the planning process offers opportunities to create more livable areas. But success is often dependent on overcoming one or more seemingly intractable barriers.

AARP's Public Policy Institute hopes that the framework introduced in this report will provide planners, regulators, policymakers, and community advocates with a clear understanding of how these common barriers affect the housing and transportation choices of older adults, as well as spark new ideas for discussion and implementation in their communities.

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Executive Summary

In 2005, AARP released *A Report to the Nation on Livable Communities: Creating Environments for Successful Aging*. The report, part of AARP's Beyond 50 series, focused on key components of livable communities for older people, including affordable and appropriate housing, supportive community features and services, and adequate mobility options. It asked whether communities will be ready for the coming unprecedented growth in the population of persons aged 50 and older and examined the many ways in which livable community features can facilitate personal independence and residents' engagement in civic and social life—benefits that ultimately contribute to successful aging. The report concluded that "those communities that design for livability empower their residents to remain independent and engaged, and offer a better quality of life."[1]

Opportunities for Creating Livable Communities builds on the findings of the earlier report with additional discussion about housing, supportive community features, and mobility options and also identifies and discusses several additional components that are integral to building and sustaining livable communities. The report identifies potential barriers to realizing livable community objectives in each of these areas and, perhaps most important, presents many examples of communities throughout the United States that have successfully implemented measures to overcome barriers, become more livable, and improve quality of life for residents of all ages and abilities.

Livable Community Components

Currently, the term "livable community" has no single, generally agreed-upon definition. Various organizations have developed their own definitions that generally reflect each organization's mission and constituency. Organizations whose main concern is the built and natural environment put more emphasis on "place," whereas organizations whose main concern is the well-being of particular demographic subgroups, such as older people or people with disabilities, put more emphasis on the community's capacity to meet its constituents' needs. Since the many components of community livability are interdependent, a definition is needed that embraces both points of view. For example, a community's capacity to provide affordable and accessible housing, transportation, and other services to specifically meet older people's needs depends to a large degree on its land use and zoning policies as well as its permitting and regulatory processes. This interdependence suggests that professionals from the public, private, and voluntary sectors must work closely together to overcome barriers that prevent their communities from becoming more livable and ensure that all residents' interests and needs are taken into account.

A comprehensive framework consisting of six key components of livable communities was developed to organize the discussion of barriers to livability, potential solutions, and community examples in this report. Each of these components plays a role in making a community livable:

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[1] AARP, *Beyond 50.05, A Report to the Nation on Livable Communities: Creating Environments for Successful Aging* (Washington, DC, 2005), p. 91.

- Housing
- Transportation and mobility
- Land use
- Cooperation and communication
- Understanding the community and planning
- Leadership

Findings

This report identifies common barriers to delivering the key components of a livable community. Among them are the following:

- A lack of diverse housing options
- Rigid separation between residential, commercial, and recreational areas
- Failure of markets to provide affordable and accessible units for all incomes and abilities
- Lack of home design features to serve residents across the life span
- Dominance of the automobile as the main mode of transportation
- Inadequate road design
- Lack of support for community design that facilitates walking
- Development patterns that favor expansion into exurban areas
- Abandonment of industrial sites
- Lack of cooperation among adjacent communities
- NIMBYism (Not In My Back Yard)
- Limited communication among agencies that could help advance livable community objectives
- Poor communication between livable community advocates and community residents
- Little public understanding about the aging boom on a community level and how it may impact decision-making and service delivery over time
- Inadequate public engagement and participation in community planning
- Lack of “political will” to implement measures that would make the community more livable

Despite these barriers, however, this report identifies many communities that are making great strides and developing innovative strategies to promote livability for persons of all ages and abilities.

Introduction

AARP commissioned this report to build on the findings of its 2005 report, *A Report to the Nation on Livable Communities: Creating Environments for Successful Aging* and delve further into barriers that hinder and conditions that facilitate the development of livable communities. The report is organized around a framework of six livable community components (see Table 1).

Several of these components have long been the focus of AARP—affordable and appropriate housing, adequate mobility options, and supportive community features and services—which together facilitate personal independence and the engagement of residents aged 50 and older in civic and social life. Housing and mobility options form the backbone of much of AARP's Livable Community Social Impact Agenda, but AARP also recognizes additional components to the development and sustainability of livable communities. The availability of housing and transportation options, for example, is rooted in a community's land use planning. The ease with which livable community projects come to fruition may depend on the community's vision and how carefully it plans its future. Thus, *Opportunities for Developing Livable Communities* addresses such issues as land use, cooperation and communication, community planning, and leadership.

The discussion of livable community components in this report also includes many examples of communities across the United States that have successfully implemented measures to become more livable and improve the quality of life for residents of all ages and abilities. Communities large and small are increasingly looking toward the livable community concept to help them address some of the most challenging issues that they face today, such as a growing population of older residents, rising housing costs, traffic congestion, limited transportation alternatives, environmental problems, lack of coordination among agencies, and limited and "silo" funding. The examples demonstrate what is possible when stakeholders work together and make livability a priority in their communities.

A recent report from the Brookings Institution states that the United States will need 60 million new housing units by the year 2030 to serve its growing population and to replace some of its aging housing stock.[2] This finding suggests that, in addition to the challenges and opportunities of long-established neighborhoods, there will be explosive growth in new communities in the coming two decades. While the prospect of such growth may seem daunting, it could also be an opportunity to spur evaluation of past and current community planning efforts, apply lessons learned, and incorporate livable community principles into future planning.

> "A Livable Community is one that has affordable and appropriate housing, supportive community features and services, and adequate mobility options. Together these facilitate personal independence and the engagement of residents in civic and social life."
>
> *AARP's Definition of a Livable Community*

[2] Arthur C. Nelson, *Toward a New Metropolis: The Opportunity to Rebuild America* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, December 2004).

Table 1: Components of Livable Communities and Common Barriers

Component	Common Barriers
Housing	• A lack of diverse housing options (e.g., single-family, multifamily, accessory dwelling, assisted living and other supportive housing) restricts choices. • Rigid separation between residential, commercial, and recreational areas makes it difficult to reach daily necessities and community amenities. • Markets fail to provide affordable and accessible units for all incomes and abilities. • Homes lack design features to serve residents across their life span.
Transportation and mobility	• The automobile is the main, and often exclusive, mode of transportation. • Other transportation options, such as public transit, are limited or nonexistent, particularly in suburban and rural areas. • Road design in many suburbs separates neighborhoods and impedes mobility; there is often little connectivity between different modes of transportation. • Walking is neither facilitated nor encouraged.
Land use	• Expansion into less dense or undeveloped areas is frequently favored over efficient use of existing urban areas. • Development tends to be scattered and separated by function and design. • Open spaces are inaccessible and unconnected. • Former industrial sites ("brownfields") are abandoned. • More energy is consumed because land uses are kept separate.
Cooperation and communication	• Cooperation among adjacent communities is limited. • NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) reactions hinder development of livable community projects • Communication among agencies that could help advance livable community objectives is limited. • Communication between livable community advocates and community residents is poor.
Public education and involvement in community planning	• Planning takes place without sufficient knowledge about the community and its residents. • The public does not fully understand the aging boom on a community level and how it may affect decision-making and service delivery over time. • Inadequate public engagement and participation in community planning affect possible options.
Leadership	• A lack of "political will" often hinders measures that would make the community more livable.

Housing

Barriers

- A lack of diverse housing options (e.g., single family, multifamily, accessory dwelling, assisted living and other supportive housing) restricts choices.
- Rigid separation between residential, commercial, and recreational areas makes it difficult to reach daily necessities and community amenities.
- Markets fail to provide affordable and accessible units for all incomes and abilities.
- Homes lack design features to serve residents across their life span.

The lack of housing types that are accessible and affordable to community residents of all incomes and abilities is a major barrier to developing livable communities. Housing is such a fundamental necessity that people often make decisions about where to live largely on the basis of what kind of housing options are available and whether these options meet their current needs and budgets. Often they do not consider what their long-term needs might be or whether their home will still be livable as they grow older. The notion of "home" has emotional and practical implications: "People form long-lasting attachments to their homes….The home is a key to personal independence and engagement in community life. It is where residents prepare to conduct their lives in the surrounding community, and it is a setting for socializing with family, friends, and neighbors."[3] People also form attachments to their neighbors, who may provide friendship as well as informal support at critical points in people's lives.

Development in the past 50 years has favored large, single-family houses, first in the suburbs and then in exurban areas where land costs are generally lower. While this pattern of constructing large quantities of inexpensive, low-density housing has helped accommodate population growth and allowed many more families to own their own homes, it has also resulted in highly dispersed communities where residential areas are far from jobs, shopping, services, schools, and other necessities, and dependence on the automobile is substantial. Not only are these homes typically surrounded by others of a similar size or type, they are also usually marketed toward people with similar incomes, thereby limiting the variety of housing in the community.

Despite the enduring popularity of such housing development and community design, this model does not necessarily respond to people's housing needs across the entire life span. Housing suitable for a young family, for example, may not be suitable when the children are grown and the parents are contemplating retirement, or when the owners are unable or unwilling to drive as much as they used to. Over the past 20 years, demand has been growing for alternative choices in housing design, location, and cost, and this trend is expected to continue. For example, up to one-third of the demand for new housing over the next couple of decades is likely to be for townhouses, apartments, and other forms of dense housing[4] in mixed-use, mixed-income neighborhoods where other forms of transportation, including public transit and walking, are viable alternatives to the automobile. In addition, according to the Center for Transit-Oriented Development, more than 14 million new households will want to locate within a half-mile of a

[3] AARP, *Beyond 50.05*, p. 91.

[4] National Multi Housing Council, *Annual Report 2004* (Washington, DC, 2004). See also Blanche Evans, "Livable Communities: Making the Case for High Density Housing" (May 1, 2005), available from http://www.realtor.org.

transit station by 2025.[5] "Mixed-use neighborhoods with a variety of housing options are good for older people," says Brett van Akkeren of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). "Various housing options enable older people to stay in the community, even if they have to downsize, and when housing, medical services, drug stores, supermarkets, and other services are in close proximity, people can walk, take short car trips, or public transportation to get to them."[6]

Conventional development, which has favored both detached, single-family home construction far from goods, services, and facilities and separation of housing options by type and cost, generally does not reflect livable community principles. According to van Akkeren, a pervasive myth is that housing development is a free-market enterprise. In fact, regulatory decisions such as zoning can affect housing supply, cost, and variety. By reducing these regulatory barriers, local governments can encourage the development of housing that will appeal to a wide variety of households and income levels.

Following are some of the most common mechanisms that communities are using to increase the availability of affordable and accessible housing options, situate housing near transit, and encourage design that preserves neighborhood character and enables people to continue living in their own homes as they grow older.

Opportunities to Expand Affordable Housing Options

Accessory Dwelling Units

Permitting and regulatory processes designed to preserve communities may unintentionally discourage livable community objectives. Prohibiting the development of accessory dwelling units is a case in point. In many communities, particularly where detached, single-family homes predominate, there may be strong resistance to any hint of greater density, whether through proposal to increase the supply of new homes or plans to build new or convert old buildings into multiunit homes in existing neighborhoods. Yet these are the only ways that many established or "built-out" communities can increase the availability of affordable housing. Such measures are particularly needed in communities where property values have priced out young families, working people, and retirees.

The addition of housing units to existing neighborhoods—through attached housing, accessory units, or conversion to multifamily dwellings—creates opportunities for communities to slowly increase density on land served by existing infrastructure without radically changing the landscape.[7] Attached housing and accessory units also provide homeowners with an opportunity to draw a steady income from the rental of these units, a boon to older people who would like to stay in their own homes but need additional income to be able to do so. Such units also enable older people who want to downsize to stay in their communities and young families that want their older parents nearby to provide them with separate but close accommodations.

[5] Center for Transit-Oriented Development. *Hidden in Plain Sight: Capturing the Demand for Housing Near Transit* (Alexandria, VA, 2004).
[6] Personal communication.
[7] Smart Growth Online, "Smart Growth Issue Areas: Housing," available from www.smartgrowth.org/about/issues.

Hyacinth Place development in Highland Park, Illinois
Photo credit: Highland Park Community Land Trust

Accessory units are separate residences that may be attached to the main house or located elsewhere on the lot. As the following example demonstrates, well-designed accessory dwelling regulations safeguard the architectural character of a neighborhood while preventing overuse of infrastructure, such as sewers and parking. California revised crucial legislation to encourage such development, and the city of Santa Cruz is often cited as a model example of a high-priced community that amended its zoning ordinance to allow accessory dwelling units in order to expand its affordable housing stock. The zoning amendment eliminated a covered parking requirement for single-family homes, thereby freeing up space for accessory units. In addition, Santa Cruz included design elements to ensure that the accessory units complement the surrounding homes. Architects designed compact building prototypes of 500 square feet and city departments pre-reviewed the plans, reducing processing time and design costs for households that wish to add an accessory unit to their property. The city also developed a manual to help residents through the accessory unit development process. To help keep the new units affordable, homeowners are eligible for financial assistance and fee waivers if the unit will be rented at affordable rates.[8]

In 2003, the program's first full year, 35 accessory units were built. In 2004, 40 permits for accessory units were issued in Santa Cruz. The program has been so successful that the city has sold more than 200 copies of its manual to other cities that are considering or intending to replicate the program. In 2005, the program received awards from the American Planning Association and the American Institute of Architects.

Inclusionary Zoning and Density Bonuses

Inclusionary zoning and density bonuses are two other local government mechanisms to increase the availability of affordable housing. Inclusionary zoning refers to planning ordinances that require a given share of new construction to be affordable to people with low to moderate incomes. Density bonuses allow developers to increase the planned number of units on a piece of property if they agree to restrict rents or sale prices on some units. Jurisdictions often use these

[8] Santa Cruz Housing and Community Development Web site, available at www.ci.santa-cruz.ca.us/pl/hcd/ADU/adu.html.

two mechanisms in tandem. For example, a new city proposal for inclusionary housing in New York City's East Village and Lower East Side states that a developer who includes 20 percent of the floor area in a project for affordable housing will get a 33 percent density bonus for the project. The affordable units would be eligible for families of four whose annual income is 80 percent of the area median income. In cases such as these, developers may also get tax breaks if the affordable housing they build is for families with even lower incomes.[9] A density bonus is advantageous for the developer because it permits the developer to build additional units on a site, thus generating more income. Sites without density bonuses are restricted by zoning codes to a lower number of units.

Illinois requires municipalities that have less than 10 percent of their housing stock categorized as "affordable" to develop affordable housing plans. One Illinois city, Highland Park, has taken a proactive approach in implementing its affordable housing plan by incorporating inclusionary housing requirements into the city code. The policy undergirding these zoning regulations "promotes the public health, safety, and welfare of its residents by promoting housing of high quality located in neighborhoods throughout the community for households of all income levels, ages, and sizes in order to meet the City's goal of preserving and promoting a culturally and economically diverse population in the City."[10] The regulation applies to all new developments and refurbished multiunit or previously nonresidential buildings that will have five or more residential dwelling units. Twenty percent of the total number of available units must be affordable; one-half of for-sale units in a development need to be affordable to households with an annual income that is less than 80 percent of the area median income and one-half for households that make between 80 and 120 percent of the area median income. Rental units also must be affordable to a range of low- and median-income households. In return for building affordable housing in Highland Park, the city offers increased density and waives fees for developers, including building permits, plan reviews, inspections, and many other fees.[11] This legislation was passed in late 2004, and by mid-2006, 11 affordable units were approved and another five were in the pipeline.

Highland Park also established an Affordable Housing Trust Fund to provide financial resources for affordable housing development. A demolition tax on residential teardowns was established to raise money for the trust fund. As of December 2007, the fund had approved development grants totaling approximately $1.8 million and had a balance of $750,000. In addition, the city launched the Highland Park Illinois Community Land Trust, which obtains land to be used to provide permanently affordable housing. Its first project was a six-unit town home development for families that was completed in September 2004. In November 2007, the Land Trust broke ground on a 14-unit ownership and rental project and the organization anticipates residents to move in by the end of 2008. In 2006, Highland Park's housing efforts received the American Planning Association's (APA) 2006 Current Topic Award for Housing Choice and Affordability.[12]

[9] Lincoln Anderson, "Lower heights, low-cost units in E.V./L.E.S. rezoning plan," *The Villager*, July 12–18, 2006.
[10] Highland Park, IL. Article XXI. Inclusionary Housing.
[11] ibid.
[12] American Planning Association, "Highland Park, Illinois, Housing Effort Receives National Planning Award," January 12, 2006. Available at http://www.planning.org/newsreleases/2006/ftp01120602.htm.

Opportunities for Transit-Oriented Community Development and Housing

General Land Use Plan

A community's general land use (or "comprehensive") plan establishes the overall character, extent, and location of various land uses and communicates the community's growth and preservation policies to residents, businesses, developers, and other interested parties.

Mixed-Use Transit-Oriented Development in Arlington County, Virginia
Photo credit: Jana Lynott

An excellent example of such a plan is the Rosslyn-Ballston Metro Corridor in Arlington County, Virginia. Arlington adopted a General Land Use Plan (GLUP) to concentrate dense, mixed-use development at five Metro stations along this corridor— Rosslyn, Court House, Clarendon, Virginia Square, and Ballston—and developed sector plans to ensure that each station maintained a distinct sense of community.

These sector plans set goals for types of use, open space, infrastructure, and design, and each plan focuses growth within a walkable radius of the stations and preserves established neighborhoods and natural areas. The Metro station locations and the GLUP guide development. Between 1999 and 2002, the corridor gained 2,500 apartments and condos, 1.5 million square feet of office space, 379,000 square feet of retail space, and five miles of bike lanes. In 2003, 1,117 housing units, 110,000 square feet of retail space, and 330,000 square feet of office space were completed, and a variety of new construction projects started.

Creating this magnitude of development at typical suburban densities could consume more than 14 square miles of open space, compared to the roughly two-square-mile Rosslyn-Ballston corridor. Metro ridership has doubled, and nearly 50 percent of corridor residents use public transit. Ironically, the popularity of the corridor development has made preserving affordable housing a challenge. To counteract rising housing prices, Arlington adopted an expanded density bonus provision for development of affordable housing, allowing up to 25 percent more density.

Arlington's policies and procedures are a model for directing residential and commercial growth to new or existing transit corridors while protecting older neighborhoods and natural areas.[13]

[13] U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "Arlington County, Virginia—National Award for Smart Growth Achievement—2002 Winners Presentation" (2002). Available at http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/arlington.htm.

Opportunities for Good Design

It is worth noting that design counts, whether it is the exterior design of affordable housing units or interior design that responds to the needs of older people and people with disabilities.

Affordable housing development or rehabilitation often appears to be undertaken without considering its impact on the character of the neighborhood, of prospective residents' feeling about the homes, or of the perceptions of the community at large. Some communities and developers, however, do take these factors into account. For example, the Highland Park initiative described earlier is very sensitive to housing equality. It specifies that the "exterior appearance of the affordable housing units in any covered development shall be visually compatible with the market rate units in the development," and the interior appearance and finishes may be altered slightly in the affordable units as long as they are substantially the same in type and quality as the market rate units."[14]

Some architects and developers are also considering the psychological and behavioral impact of housing design. For example, Nehemiah Spring Creek Houses is a housing project now under way in Brooklyn, New York, consisting of 117 row houses reserved for lower-income families and sponsored by East Brooklyn Congregations, a 20-year-old nonprofit consortium of churches. The houses in this project have been designed by well-known architect Alexander Gorlin, whose project design radically alters the appearance of the row houses that the organization has been developing since the mid-1980s in impoverished areas of the city. The new design will include exteriors infused with color, including jades, slates, deep reds, and creams, and no two adjacent houses will be the same color. Furthermore, the siting of the buildings on their lots will be different from past Nehemiah row houses, which had their short concrete driveways placed in front. "In Mr. Gorlin's view, that suburban model cuts the house off from the sidewalk, depriving people of a place to mingle. At Spring Creek, he plans to have all the driveways in the back. 'It's better to have the front door open directly to the street,' he said. 'The sidewalk, not the driveway, becomes a place to meet and talk.'" Many believe that this new approach will help strengthen the project's "sense of community" and that

Nehemiah Spring Creek housing project
Photo credit: Alexander Gorlin Architects

[14] Highland Park, IL. Article XXI. Inclusionary Housing.

the "facades' bright and individualistic colors could inspire new owners to take better care of their houses."[15]

Visitability, Universal Design, and Home Modification

Concrete Change, a Georgia advocacy group, pioneered the concept of "visitability," which refers to a set of features that make the main floor of homes more accessible to people with disabilities. Some physical design elements, such as steps leading to every entrance to the home, may unintentionally prevent people with disabilities from visiting and socializing with family, friends, and neighbors. The visitability concept calls for removal of some of these barriers so that homes have at least one zero-step entrance and 32 inches of clear passage on all interior doors of the main level, as well as a half or full bathroom on the main level.[16]

Ideally, all homes would have visitability features. In Georgia, a coalition of homebuilders and advocates (including AARP) developed an EasyLiving Home program with three primary design criteria that are similar to the visitability standard. The features are marketed to both builders and consumers as very low cost and highly desired amenities. The marketing experience has been positive thus far, and more than 20 participating builders have built more than 130 homes, with several hundred more homes in various stages of development. The homes provide the following amenities:

- Easy Access (a step-free entrance with a threshold not more than one-half inch rise from a driveway, sidewalk, or other firm route into the main floor)
- Easy Passage (a minimum of 32 inches of clear passage space for every interior passage door on the main floor—including bathrooms—and the exterior door to the step-free entrance)
- Easy Use (at least one bedroom, a kitchen, some entertainment area, and one full bathroom with designated maneuvering space, all on the main floor)[17]

This EasyLiving Home offers a step free entrance
Photo credit: EasyLiving Home[cm]

[15] C. J. Hughes, "Affordable Houses Infused with Color," *New York Times,* August 27, 2006.
[16] AARP, *Beyond 50.05*, p. 56.
[17] Ibid.

People of all ages and abilities can live comfortably in homes that have universal design features, such as lever faucets and door handles, 28-inch-high countertops, grab bars in bathrooms, and a range of other features. A program in Irvine, California, encourages developers to offer, and prospective homeowners to incorporate, universal design features into the design of their new homes. The city's Accessible Housing Task Force developed a voluntary program for homebuilders to offer buyers a list of 33 accessibility features and indicate which of the features are available at the company's building project and whether the features are standard, limited, or optional. The list identifies the cost, if any, to the homebuyer and at what point in the course of construction the feature must be installed. Sellers and buyers alike must sign an acknowledgment that the list of features was provided to the buyer. By 2004, virtually all of Irvine's new homebuilders were participating in this voluntary program.[18]

As the population ages, new strategies will need to be developed to enable people to stay in their homes for as long as they would like. The vast majority of people aged 50 and older say that they would like to "age in place," meaning that they would like to stay in their current homes or move to another suitable residence in the same community as they grow older.[19] At some point, many of these seniors will need help with home maintenance and/or home modification. Often a simple home repair, such as fixing a leaky roof, or modification, such as replacing a bathtub with a walk-in shower or installing a ramp to facilitate entry into the home, is all that is needed for an older person or a person with a disability to continue living at home safely and independently. When finances are not an issue, the resident can hire professionals to make repairs and modifications as needed. The difficulty arises, of course, when lower-income people cannot afford such renovations and modifications. Where can they turn for help?

While some public funding is available for home modifications through, for instance, the Department of Veterans Affairs and Medicaid in some states, it is highly restrictive and benefits only a narrow segment of the population. Low-interest loans for home modifications may also be available from such corporations as Fannie Mae and banks such as Bank of America. But if income is a problem, a loan may not be a viable option. Volunteer organizations are seeking to fill the gap. The largest such organization is Rebuilding Together, a network of 245 affiliates operating in all 50 states that is preserving and revitalizing homes for low-income residents. Nationally, its work has resulted in the repair and rehabilitation of more than 105,000 houses and nonprofit facilities involving more than 24,000,000 volunteer hours. A local example is Baltimore County, Maryland, where Rebuilding Together Baltimore has mobilized a volunteer workforce to help low-income homeowners, particularly seniors, people with disabilities, and families with children, maintain and adapt their homes. With support from the Baltimore County Office of Community Conservation, the Baltimore Housing Authority, and a variety of businesses and foundations in the community, Rebuilding Together has mobilized 19,400 volunteers and repaired 966 homes since 1990.[20]

[18] National Council on Disability, *Livable Communities for Adults with Disabilities* (December 2, 2006), pp. 44–45. Available from www.ncd.gov.
[19] AARP, *The State of 50+ America* (Washington, DC, 2006), p. 43.
[20] Rebuilding Together Baltimore, "Local and National Impact Statements" (2007). Available from http://www.rtbaltimore.org/impact.html.

Transportation and Mobility

Barriers

- The automobile is the main, and often exclusive, mode of transportation.
- Other transportation options, such as public transit, are limited or nonexistent, particularly in suburban and rural areas.
- Road design in many suburbs separates neighborhoods and impedes mobility; there is often lack of connectivity between different modes of transportation.
- Walking is neither facilitated nor encouraged.

> *The livability of a community depends in part on multiple mobility options that allow residents of all ages and abilities to connect with their communities. Having transportation options contributes to maintaining independence and to people feeling they have control over their own lives. Individuals who engage in the civic and social life of their communities are happier and healthier; transportation is the means by which they physically reach other people and activities in their communities.*[21]

Providing multiple mobility options is a key characteristic of livable communities. Yet land use patterns over the past 50 years turned the United States into an automobile-dependent nation. Results of the 2001 National Household Travel Survey (NHTS), the first household survey of daily and long-distance travel among U.S. households, point out that about 88 percent of persons 15 years of age or older are drivers, and only 8 percent of households report not having a vehicle available for regular use. Thus, it is no surprise that the dominant mode of transportation for both daily and long-distance travel is by personal vehicle.

The findings also show that the traditional working population—people between the ages of 25 and 54—took the most daily trips (4.6), whereas individuals aged 65 and older took only slightly fewer trips, an average of 3.4 per day. Walking accounted for the next most frequently used mode of transportation; the survey showed that 9 percent of all trips were taken on foot. Public transit accounted for only 2 percent of daily trips taken in 2001. The gap between the percentage of trips taken by automobile and the those taken by transit or walking is striking.[22]

While some of the carless 8 percent do not have cars by choice, it is important to note that for a significant minority of people in the United States, the automobile is not a real mobility option.[23] This group includes many people with low incomes, older people, people with disabilities, and others. Generally speaking, older people who no longer drive can get rides from family members, friends, or neighbors, even though they may "dislike the sense of dependency that comes with getting a ride."[24] Others, however, are less fortunate. According to the 2003 National Transportation Availability and Use Survey, 3.5 million Americans never leave their homes, and more than half of the homebound (1.9 million) are people with disabilities. Of these nearly 2 million people with disabilities, 560,000 indicated that they never leave home because of

[21] AARP, *Beyond 50.05*, p. 74.
[22] Bureau of Transportation Statistics, 2001 National Household Travel Survey (NHTS), 2004. Available from www.bts.gov/publications.
[23] AARP, *Beyond 50.05*, p. 84.
[24] Ibid., p. 77.

transportation difficulties.[25] The growing number of older persons and, possibly, people with disabilities in the United States may lead to even more people having transportation difficulties in the future, particularly those who live in suburban and rural areas.

One obvious alternative to driving is using public transportation. But as the 2001 NHTS findings show, but only slightly more than 4% of Americans use public transportation on a given day. This low percentage is due in part to the fact that, given the choice of traveling by personal vehicle or using public transportation, most people prefer to travel in the comfort of their own vehicles rather than take a bus or train, and this holds true regardless of the age of the driver.[26] Another reason more people do not use public transportation is that in many parts of the country, public transportation is too limited to be useful or simply does not exist. Public transit systems, such as buses, subways, and light rail systems, are expensive to build and maintain and are economically viable only when enough people use them. When it comes to public transportation, residential density is destiny, both in terms of communities' ability to support public transportation and the likelihood that residents will use it. Areas with higher population density often have a higher level of public transit service.[27] Viable public transportation is more likely to exist, and people are more likely to use it, in densely populated, mixed-use communities with residences, transit stations, stores, and services in close proximity.

Creating Opportunities for Improved Mobility

As described in the section on housing, some communities, like Arlington, Virginia, are orienting residential and commercial development toward existing transit systems to facilitate residents' use of public transportation. A survey by the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission found that 25 percent of persons age 75 and older who live in a walkable, mixed-use community such as the Rosslyn-Ballston Transit Oriented Development Corridor in Arlington, Virginia, used fixed-route public transportation in the month prior to the survey.[28] Other communities are also increasing residential density to make the communities "transit ready" or to expand the availability of existing public transportation. In a residential setting, a minimum net density of seven households per acre is needed to support basic bus service with 30- to 60-minute intervals, and a minimum net density of nine households per acre is needed to support a light rail system. To achieve mixed-use, transit-supportive development around heavy rail stations such those served by Metrorail in the Washington, D.C. area, projects should have a floor area ratio of 1.00 to 2.00 (a two-story building taking up half the site would be considered a floor area ratio of 1.00).[29] An illustrative example is the current transformation of a "brownfield" (an abandoned industrial site) into a new, mixed-use community in Redding, Connecticut (see

[25] AARP, *Livable Communities for Adults with Disabilities*, p. 48. See also www.bts.gov/publications/freedom_to_travel/pdf.
[26] Transportation Research Board, "Estimating the Impacts of the Aging Population on Transit Ridership" (January 2006). Available from http://www.trb.org/news/blurb-detail.asp?id=5867.
[27] Ibid., p. 5
[28] Northern Virginia Transportation Commission, "Meeting the Transportation Needs of Northern Virginia's Seniors: Recommendations for Public Transit Systems and Other Mobility Providers," Final Report (March 24, 2006), figure 3.14, pp. 3–17.
[29] Frederick C. Dock and Carol J. Swenson, in *Developing Around Transit: Strategies and Solutions That Work* (Washington, DC: Urban Land Institute, 2004), p. 62.

Land Use), which is allowing a new train station to be built thanks to the "critical mass" of new residential and commercial development that can support it.

When people cannot drive or use public transportation because of mobility limitations or disability, paratransit services may help them get where they need to go. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), transit operators must provide paratransit services along existing fixed-route bus or rail systems unless doing so would result in an "undue burden."[30] While paratransit services are indispensable to many people with disabilities, they are not always convenient. In many jurisdictions, people with disabilities must travel from their homes to the paratransit stop, often without help, and paratransit vehicle drivers are not permitted to leave their vehicles to assist passengers. Paratransit schedules are often inflexible and people may be left waiting hours for the vehicle to arrive, although the growing use of cell phones is helping to alleviate this problem. Some observers are concerned that paratransit systems are too expensive and drain much-needed resources from public transportation.[31] Others say that despite some improvements in recent years, paratransit services still are not sufficiently concerned about customer satisfaction.[32]

The limitations of public transit and paratransit services have led some communities to experiment with alternatives that are more responsive to the needs of residents. For example, Aging Atlanta, part of the Atlanta Regional Commission and a grantee of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Community Partnerships for Older Adults, is conducting a pilot transportation voucher program that provides older people with a set amount of funds that they can use in any way that they like to purchase rides. They can use the vouchers to hire friends or family members to drive them, to ride the bus or train, or to take a taxi. Aging Atlanta has found that this pilot program gives people a lot more freedom to choose where and when they want to go and is less expensive than traditional van services that take older adults to doctors' offices or senior centers.[33] In San Mateo, California, the Department of Aging and Adult Services developed a program to teach older residents who no longer drive to use the public transportation system in their community. The Independent Transportation

Photo credit: ITN Portland

[30] National Council on Disability, *Livable Communities for People with Disabilities*, p. 48.
[31] Brett van Akkeren, Environmental Protection Agency, personal communication.
[32] Jon Burkhardt, Westat Corp., personal communication.
[33] Kathryn Lawler, Aging Atlanta, personal communication.

Network (ITN) is a nonprofit program that uses automobiles and paid and volunteer drivers to provide door-to-door service for seniors. Started as a pilot project in Portland, Maine, ITN received grants from the federal government to build a model and replication tools for economically sustainable, consumer-oriented transit for older people that other communities can use to develop their own alternative transportation systems.[34]

Other communities are focusing on "creating redundancy, resiliency and connectivity within their transportation networks, and ensuring connectivity among pedestrian, bike, transit, and road facilities. In short, they are coupling a multimodal approach to transportation with supportive land-use patterns that create a wider range of transportation options"[35] and ensure unimpeded mobility throughout the community for people of all ages and abilities.

- The Transit Oriented Development Incentive Program in San Mateo County, California, recognizes that coordinating land use and transportation is critical to achieving an efficient transportation system and making the best use of tax dollars. The City/County Association of Governments of San Mateo County provides incentives for land-use agencies in 20 constituent cities as well as the county to create housing near transit stations. Under the program, a jurisdiction receives incentive funds based on the number of bedrooms in the housing units that will be built (up to $2000 per bedroom as of time of writing)[36]. To be eligible for the program, housing must be within one-third of a mile of a rail transit station and density must be at least 40 units per acre. Once the units are built or are under construction, land-use agencies may use the funds for transportation improvements, as well as general improvements such as landscaping, lighting, sidewalks, plazas, and other related uses.[37] Some have used them to address neighborhood concerns. From 1999 to 2004, the San Mateo program allocated $5.2 million to support development of 3,689 bedrooms in ten projects.[38]

- Streets with high levels of connectivity offer drivers alternate routes in case of congestion and accidents. Once the pride of suburban neighborhoods, cul-de-sacs—dead-end residential streets often ending with a large circular patch of pavement allowing vehicles to turn around—hinder connectivity and are being "excoriated in certain quarters…as a detriment to security, community, and efficient transportation."[39] Critics of cul-de-sacs claim that they do not provide ease of access to other areas and thwart neighborliness by essentially isolating streets—and residents—from one another. To discourage cul-de-sacs in new developments, several years ago the City Council of Northfield, Minnesota, a city of 17,000 about 45 miles south of Minneapolis, passed an ordinance saying that cul-de-sacs can "only be used to the extent that the topography,

[34] http://pubsindex.trb.org/document/view/default.asp?lbid=651297.
[35] Smart Growth Network and ICMA, *Getting to Smart Growth*, 2002, p. 62. Available from http://smartgrowth.org/library/articles.asp?art=1427.
[36] Telephone interview with Richard Napier, Executive Director, City/County Association of Governments of San Mateo County, California, January 8, 2008.
[37] U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "2002 Smart Growth Achievement Award," 2002. Available from www.epa.gov/livablecommunities/san_mateo.htm.
[38] Smart Growth Network, "Smart Growth in Action: San Mateo Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Incentive Program, San Mateo, California,". Available from http://smartgrowth.org/library/articles.asp?art=1827&res=800.
[39] Carla Baranaukas, "Why some towns place roadblocks on cul-de-sacs," *New York Times*, August 27, 2006.

wetlands, or other physical features necessitate their use."[40] Even in communities where cul-de-sacs are prized, planners are rethinking their utility. In Eagan, a suburb 25 miles from Northfield, for example, 40 cul-de-sacs have now been designated "future through streets"[41] to improve ease of access.

- A planning ordinance in the small college town of Davidson, North Carolina, states that "in order to prevent the destruction of what we love, we must avoid large-lot sprawl type development, totally automobile-dependent development, enclave development that puts people into protected areas where their fellow residents are unwelcome, and development at such a pace that we are unable to assimilate new residents into the life of the Town…. In Davidson and, indeed in the entire country, growth has been totally dependent on the private passenger automobile. The result has been roads choked with vehicles and air befouled with their wastes. Such development is clearly not sustainable."[42] To reverse this trend, the ordinance says that public policy must allow people to "live, work, shop, visit, pray, and attend school in one area," and that it must "make it possible to do some of life's activities without getting into our cars." The ordinance also says that "old neighborhoods must be interconnected via new streets and greenways, and new neighborhoods must connect to adjacent neighborhoods and undeveloped property." The community's goal is to have a grid of streets, rather than a few arterial roads that carry most of the transportation burden; make walking and bicycling more possible; reduce the length of car trips; and make neighborhoods integral parts of the town instead of "cul-de-sac hideaways."[43] The town of 8,100 requires pedestrian, bicycle, and street circulation plans for all new development and requires narrow, tree-lined streets with on-street parking and sidewalks on both sides of the street.[44]

"Walkable communities…enhance mobility, reduce negative environmental consequences, strengthen economies, and support stronger communities through social interaction."[45] Unfortunately, many communities do not have sidewalks, bike lanes, or trails, making it difficult if not impossible for people to walk or bike to destinations. Young children, older people, and people with disabilities who use assistive devices such as wheelchairs are especially affected by lack of sidewalks in their communities. Recognizing this barrier to mobility, Bill Purcell, the mayor of Nashville, Tennessee, made building and improving the sidewalks of the city a primary goal. All the streets and every foot of Nashville's 727 miles of sidewalk were assessed and in 2002, the mayor's office unveiled a strategic plan for sidewalks and bikeways. The plan was prepared by outside contractors under the direction of a Citizen's Advisory Committee that included advocates for people with disabilities, a physical therapist, community health specialists, and avid walkers and cyclists. In the final plan, a detailed scoring system was devised to prioritize all sidewalk repair and construction projects. Priority was assigned based on the

[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Davidson Planning Department, "General Principles for Planning in Davidson." Available at http://www.ci.davidson.nc.us/units/planning/ordinance/pdfs/Section%2001%20-%20General%20Principles.pdf.
[43] Ibid.
[44] U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "2004 EPA Smart Growth Achievement Award." Available at www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/sg_awards_publication_2004.htm.
[45] Smart Growth Network and ICMA, *Getting to Smart Growth*, p. 26.

necessity of the project for ADA compliance, the number of people affected, the types of people affected (e.g., children, seniors, and people with disabilities), and whether the projects provide access to key services identified in public opinion surveys, such as schools, libraries, parks, stores, senior centers, and assisted living facilities. This mammoth project will take years and many millions of dollars to complete.[46] In addition, Nashville's Metro Planning Commission recently adopted subdivision regulations that provide "standards to support more walkable subdivision through improved connections, reduced block lengths, discouragement of cul-de-sacs, and the provision of context sensitive street design."[47] [48]

[46] National Council on Disability, *Livable Communities for Adults with Disabilities,* 2004, p. 77.
[47] Subdivision Regulations adopted March 9, 2006. See www.nashville.gov/mpc/expanded_subdiv_regs_doc.htm.
[48] An advocacy group called Complete the Streets is leading a movement to encourage planners, engineers, and designers to build road networks that are hospitable to bikers, pedestrians, and bus riders of all ages and abilities, in addition to motorists. See www.completestreets.org.

Land Use

Barriers

- Expansion into less dense or undeveloped areas is frequently favored over efficient use of existing urban areas.
- Development tends to be scattered and separated by function and design.
- Open spaces are inaccessible and unconnected.
- Former industrial sites ("brownfields") are abandoned.
- More energy is consumed because land uses are kept separate.

A community's capacity to provide affordable and appropriate housing, supportive community features and services, and adequate mobility options for people of all ages and abilities is rooted in its local zoning codes and related land use policies. These policies determine how a community grows; where houses, stores, workplaces, schools, health care institutions, and other structures will be built; and even what transportation options and recreation opportunities will be available to residents. In short, these policies determine a community's infrastructure and, hence, its character and livability.

On the surface, it may seem that the marketplace (i.e., consumer demand) is the driving force behind a community's development policies. While the market does play an important role, so do federal, state, and local policies. For example, the 1956 Interstate Highway Act and the Federal Housing Administration's mortgage financing program facilitated sprawl, whether or not that was the original intention of these policy decisions. State and local community policies also have an impact on land use patterns.

- Local zoning regulations determine the size, type, and density of housing that can be provided in specific areas.
- Roads, sewers, parks, and schools provided by government influence private investment decisions.
- Housing codes facilitate or stifle rehabilitation efforts.
- Certain environmental rules create barriers to redevelopment of abandoned property.
- Tax laws create incentives to buy larger houses.[49]

As mentioned earlier, community growth in the past 50 years has followed a pattern of expansion into suburban and exurban areas following conventional development principles that mandate separation of land uses. These principles ensure that a parcel of land is used exclusively for a single purpose, such as housing in one parcel and commercial development in another. "Many traditional suburban landscapes are characterized by segregated land use as a result of local zoning decisions—with shopping and services in one area, single-family housing in another, and multifamily rental housing concentrated elsewhere, often with poor, if any, connections among them."[50]

[49] U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "About Smart Growth" 2007. Available from the EPA Web site at http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/about_sg.htm.
[50] AARP, *A Report to the Nation on Livable Communities: Creating Environments for Successful Aging*, p. 66.

This dispersed pattern of development uses land inefficiently, does not support alternatives to automobile transportation, and makes people spend much of their time traveling among home, work, shopping, school, and other places. As the AARP *Beyond 50.05* survey findings show, suburban residents are more likely than urban residents to give their communities poor grades for a number of community features, such as offering dependable public transportation, having a drugstore and grocery store within a half-mile of home, having a hospital in the community, and having convenient places for public events and meetings.[51] Sprawling exurban developments, such as those that are springing up in the Sun Belt and Far West states[52] and attracting younger families and retirees alike, often have little sense of place and no inviting downtown area to draw people and facilitate their interaction with others. Sprawling malls and exclusive reliance on the automobile undermine "the viability of opportunities for people to walk to shops [and] meet and chat with their neighbors on the way."[53] As the AARP survey suggests, residents of outer suburbs, where amenities such as public transportation and easy access to stores and services are less likely to exist, are more likely to give their communities poor grades, and residents who give their communities poor grades are more likely to say that they frequently feel isolated.[54]

In contrast, higher-density, mixed-use, more compact communities make walking and biking to destinations possible and can sustain transportation alternatives such as buses or trains. According to planning experts, people will willingly walk to destinations such as transit stops that are within a radius of one quarter to one half of a mile.[55]

Mixing land uses also has economic and social benefits. Most communities receive more net fiscal gains from commercial development than from housing development, so a mix of retail, offices, and housing will generate more tax revenues than a purely bedroom community. The commercial real estate market is strongest, the property values are highest, and economic activity is greatest in "24-hour" cities and suburbs where residences are in close proximity to commercial enterprises. More pedestrian traffic in these areas helps make streets feel safer. And, perhaps best of all, mixed-use development attracts people, maximizes spontaneous contact among residents and visitors, and provides a sense of community that invites their participation. It is also the kind of development that best serves demographic subgroups such as older people and people with disabilities, whose needs are rarely, if ever, considered in community planning activities.

Deborah Howe, PhD, chair of the Department of Community and Regional Planning at Ambler College, Temple University, points out that "by bringing land uses together, we reduce the time, distance, and effort of travel. This gives older people alternatives to driving and eases the demand for transportation services." An example of mixed-use development that particularly benefits older people and people with disabilities, she says, is the co-location of housing and services, such as including a medical clinic within a senior high-rise and building housing adjacent to or within walking distance of shopping, restaurants, medical care, and other services.[56]

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[51] Ibid., p. 62.
[52] Rick Lyman, "Surge of Population in the Exurbs Continues," *New York Times*, July 16, 2006.
[53] Smart Growth Network and ICMA, *Getting to Smart Growth*, p. 2.
[54] AARP, *A Report to the Nation on Livable Communities*, pp. 62–64.
[55] Smart Growth Network and ICMA, *Getting to Smart Growth*, p. 11.
[56] Deborah Howe, *Aging and Smart Growth*, Funders' Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities, Translation Paper Number Seven, (Miami, FL: Collins Center for Public Policy, Inc.), December 2001.

Realizing Land Use Opportunities

States and local communities are in a position to develop policies and provide a variety of incentives to encourage the kind of development that contributes to livability:

- Zoning amendments, such as those promoted in Georgia by Aging Atlanta, a grantee of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Community Partnerships for Older Adults program, to allow senior housing to be built in traditionally single-family neighborhoods so that older residents are able to downsize their living situations and still remain in their communities (see the Cooperation and Communication section for more about Aging Atlanta's efforts).

- Incentives for businesses and homeowners to locate in areas with existing infrastructure and that encourage home renovation and rehabilitation in existing neighborhoods. In Ohio, for example, "the Cuyahoga County Treasurer's Office, working with private banks and local municipalities, has helped finance more than 4,700 home improvement loans worth over $57 million, stemming out-migration, helping residents stay in their homes, and strengthening compact, diverse, and livable neighborhoods for less than $1 million per year."[57]

- Codes and innovative zoning tools that encourage mixed-use communities and model design standards. Oregon's Model Development Code and Users' Guide for Small Cities, for example, was developed to assist smaller communities, especially those 197 Oregon cities with fewer than 10,000 people that do not have the resources to revise outdated development codes and ordinances that create barriers to "smart development." The guide covers zoning practices that allow mixed-use development, street standards, and other topics. The Model Development Code won the Smart Growth—Sustainability Year 2000 Award from the American Planning Association and the American Society of Consulting Planners.[58]

- Incentives that encourage people to live near work, such as the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development's "Live Near Your Work"[59] program; bonus regional transportation funding to communities that build high-density housing near mass transit; and economic development subsidies to businesses that provide jobs that are accessible by public transit and/or close to affordable housing. For example, Illinois' "location-efficient" incentives law (Business Location Efficiency Incentive Act, SB 2885) encourages companies to make siting decisions that create more job opportunities for workers who cannot afford a car, avoid costly new infrastructure expenses, reduce sprawl, and promote more affordable housing.[60]

[57] U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "National Award for Smart Growth Achievement 2003," available from www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/sg_awards.
[58] For more information about the model code, contact the Oregon Transportation and Growth Management Program at 503-373-0050.
[59] www.op.state.md.us/smart-growth/lnyw **[page not accessible]**
[60] Good Jobs First, available at www.goodjobsfirst.org.

Policies that promote community livability are not generated exclusively at the top. Grassroots advocacy can also influence policy development. In Connecticut, for example, a coalition of business, municipal, church, and education leaders, called 1,000 Friends of Connecticut, was recently formed to counteract what they viewed as the state's "mindless approach to growth,"[61] which has led to sprawl, traffic, disintegrating urban centers, abandoned factories, and vacant industrial sites. The coalition is calling on the state's governor "to adopt 'smarter' policies that will begin directing growth toward existing infrastructure and public transit."[62] The group has issued a "Leader's Guide" that lays out a series of recommendations for such policies; advocates for the appointment of a "smart growth coordinator" for the state; educates and mobilizes the public; convenes stakeholders; researches fiscal, regulatory, land use, and transportation initiatives; and provides tools and models to measure progress. The "1,000 Friends" idea began in Oregon 30 years ago and has also spread to states such as Pennsylvania, Florida, and New Jersey.

In Connecticut, some developers may be ahead of the curve already, with a variety of projects that find opportunities for development within existing communities, such as on parking lots or barren or blighted areas, with a view toward conserving land, reducing reliance on automobiles, creating affordable housing, and stimulating job growth. Examples of this kind of development in Connecticut include a "$160 million mixed-use project taking shape on a barren plane of asphalt in downtown West Hartford," a 55-acre brownfields redevelopment project that is turning the Gilbert & Bennett Wire Mill in Redding into a self-contained, pedestrian-friendly village,[63] and similar redevelopment efforts in South Norwalk and Stamford.[64]

From its inception in 1995, the EPA's Brownfields Program has been helping communities around the country transform brownfields into green space and revitalized neighborhoods by providing communities with grants to assess and, if warranted, clean up the environment; technical assistance with regulatory and liability issues; and environmental training for residents. Cooperation among federal, state, and local agencies and governments and state, local, and private investment are needed to ensure that these kinds of projects are brought to fruition.[65]

[61] Lisa Prevost, "Confronting a Pattern of Warped Growth," *New York Times*, July 16, 2006.
[62] Ibid.
[63] U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "2005 Smart Growth Achievement Awards," available from http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/awards/sg_awards.
[64] Ibid.
[65] U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "Brownfields and Land Revitalization," available from http://www.epa.gov/brownfields.

Photo credit: Catholic Charities

Whether or not environmental decontamination is required, many brownfield revitalization projects are enormous, encompassing hundreds of acres and requiring many millions of dollars. These projects usually involve local governments and private companies that are interested in development (e.g., office parks and large housing developments) that will yield more tax dollars for government coffers and profit for private developers. But smaller brownfields projects that do not have primarily commercial interests do arise from time to time. These projects may be spearheaded by local governments or nonprofit organizations and often involve a blend of disciplines that help raise funds and develop the property. For example, Portland, Oregon, chose for redevelopment a former battery recycling facility that sat vacant for a number of years. Lead contamination was removed and the site was chosen as the new location of the Port City Development Center, a nonprofit organization that provides job training, work placement, art programs, and residential living skills to individuals with developmental disabilities.[66] In 2000, the Phoenix Awards, which recognize "innovative yet practical remediation projects that bring blighted, old commercial and industrial sites back to productive use," gave an award to the Catholic Charities' Fatima Family Center in Cleveland, Ohio, for decontaminating a former laundry facility and transforming it into a family center that responds to emergency needs and provides senior and day care services, youth programs, summer programs, and counseling services.[67]

Photo credit: Catholic Charities

Sound land use decisions not only make the built environment more livable but also preserve the natural environment, from urban parks to rural farmland. Strategic preservation of open space helps protect sensitive environmental areas, combats air pollution, controls erosion, moderates temperatures, protects surface and groundwater, provides recreational

[66] http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/pdf/ss_portl.pdf
[67] Phoenix Awards, available at http://www.phoenixawards.org.

opportunities, and maintains or improves citizens' quality of life. These factors are not only key ingredients in making communities more livable, they also contribute to the health and well-being of all residents, including older adults, who may be particularly sensitive to pollutants and excessive heat. Easily accessible parks and hiking and biking trails contribute to community health by encouraging exercise and bringing people together for recreation. A number of communities, for example, have organized walking clubs for older people, and the availability of well-maintained, shaded, and safe routes for walking makes it more likely that people will use them.

On average, 15 percent of an established city's area consists of vacant land that is available for development.[68] This land may also be used as parkland and greenspace. Directing new development toward existing infrastructure, rather than spreading out into new areas beyond the suburban fringe, makes it possible to save public dollars and conserve energy by avoiding the need to construct new roads and provide additional utilities.

It may also be possible to improve air quality by reducing dependence on the automobile. Development in existing neighborhoods rather than on open space can lower vehicle miles traveled by as much as 60 percent; transportation alternatives, such as walking, biking, and public transit, help mitigate air pollution by reducing auto mileage and smog-forming emissions.[69] A number of studies have made connections between high levels of pollution and asthma. Studies suggest, for example, that efforts to reduce driving in Atlanta during the 1996 Olympics may have reduced the number of acute care asthma cases by 11 to 44 percent.[70]

In addition to beautifying neighborhoods and parks, trees play an important role in maintaining air and water quality. Trees "filter pollution from vehicular traffic and mitigate erosion that causes damage to roadways."[71] They provide shade and cool homes and communities, thereby reducing energy costs. They also slow pollutant-laden stormwater runoff, thereby reducing the cost of water treatment. In paved-over urban environments, leafy parks are a green refuge. Parks and other greenery help mitigate "heat islands" that arise in urban and suburban environments, particularly during the summer when temperatures rise, sometimes to dangerous levels.

In the summer of 1995, for example, Chicago experienced a blistering heat wave that knocked out power to thousands of households and killed hundreds of people, most of them elderly.[72] In 1998, not long after that urban disaster, the Chicago Department of Environment began an initiative to "reduce ambient summer temperatures in Chicago, decrease energy usage, and increase available green space in the city." The heat mitigation techniques that Chicago is using include the following:

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[68] Michael A. Pagano and Ann O'M. Bowman, "Vacant Land in Cities: An Urban Resource" (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, December 2000). Available from http://www.brookings.edu.
[69] U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "About Smart Growth" 2007. Available from the EPA Web site at http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/about_sg.htm.
[70] U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "2005 National Award for Smart Growth Achievement," available from www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/awards.
[71] Smart Growth Network and ICMA, *Getting to Smart Growth*, p. 36.
[72] Eric Klinenberg, *Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

- An ordinance adopted in 1999 that increases tree-planting requirements for parking lots and requires plantings on parking structures and in garage setbacks.
- Rooftop gardens, such as the one installed atop the 11-story City Hall in downtown Chicago. This green roofing system uses stormwater as a primary source of irrigation as well as conventional water sources. The garden incorporates native plants that are drought and wind tolerant.
- Light-colored roofs and alternative paving materials.[73]

The majority of people in the United States support the preservation of open space,[74] and a number of mechanisms are available to communities to facilitate preservation. Maryland, for example, has been recognized as a national model for states that are trying to preserve natural areas. Its Program Open Space uses the state real estate transfer tax[75] to provide 100 percent funding for acquisition of parkland and 75 percent of development costs for local and state parks and recreation areas.[76] Since it began in 1969, Program Open Space has supported the purchase, in whole or in part, of nearly all of the land bought by the state's Department of Natural Resources. More than 4,000 individual county and municipal parks and conservation areas exist because of the program.[77]

Other mechanisms that can be applied to conserve open spaces include zoning codes that allow developers to build on a greater number of lots than normally allowed in exchange for dedicating additional open space; purchase of development rights, which keeps properties such as farmland in private hands but bars any future development of the land; and a dedicated sales tax to buy and preserve open land. Political will, public support, and mechanisms such as these can help protect the environment and ensure that open spaces are preserved for generations to come.

[73] ICMA, "Urban Heat Island Initiative," available at www.icma.org.
[74] Smart Growth Tends, EPA National Award for Smart Growth Achievement 2003, www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/sg_awards.
[75] With the real estate transfer tax, state and local taxes are assessed on real property when ownership of the property is transferred between parties. States often use these tax revenues to fund programs to preserve open space and low-income housing.
[76] Smart Growth Network and ICMA, *Getting to Smart Growth*, p. 46.
[77] http://www.dnr.state.md.us/pos.asp

Cooperation and Communication

Barriers

- Cooperation among adjacent communities is limited.
- NIMBY reactions hinder development of livable community projects.
- Communication among agencies that could help advance livable community objectives is limited.
- Communication between livable community advocates and community residents is poor.

Some observers of community behavior have found that local governments in a region often do not work collaboratively around land use planning. Instead of engaging in regional coordination and a common economic strategy, local governments are "pitted against each other in a zero-sum game" to attract tax-generating development, with little or no consideration of the impact that the development will have on residents' quality of life.[78] Competition among communities for tax revenue frequently results in sprawling shopping malls, auto dealerships, and big-box retailers—not exactly the kind of development that leads to livable communities.[79]

Another kind of competition is played out daily between neighboring communities and among neighborhoods within communities over development or changes that residents do not want "in their backyard." The catalyst may be something as minor as a proposal to convert a private house on a suburban street or a group home for developmentally disabled adults. Or it could be a proposal to allow increased density in a neighborhood of single-family homes by permitting developers to build multiunit, low-income housing. One reason for the NIMBY reaction may be that residents feel their community or neighborhood is being unfairly targeted for this new development. Planners argue that a cooperative, regional fair-share housing allocation plan across metropolitan areas that spreads such housing across many different jurisdictions could do a lot to combat NIMBYism[80] and achieve livable community objectives.

In other cases of NIMBYism, poor communication may be the underlying problem. Advocates who have been involved in NIMBY-inspired battles say that reaching out to residents to find out what people are upset about specifically, providing a forum to discuss the issues, and carefully crafting messages in terms that people can relate to and understand are all viable ways to win over skeptics and opponents.

Good communication skills are essential for marketing livable community objectives to the public. For example, the phrase "increased density" may conjure an image of a vibrant, mixed-use community in the minds of advocates, but to residents, "density" in their community sounds a lot less desirable, as if something of value were going to be taken away rather than added to their community. Recognizing this communication gap, some planners and livable community advocates are "showing" rather than "telling" as they market their livable community ideas and

[78] Myron Orfield, "The region the true city," in Emilie Buchwald (ed.), *Toward the Livable City* (Minneapolis: Milweed, 2003), pp. 169–178.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Marya Morris, Duncan Associates, personal communication; Smart Growth Network and ICMA, *Getting to Smart Growth*.

plans to residents, developers, and elected officials to ensure that terminology doesn't get in the way of communicating essential and beneficial concepts to an often skeptical audience.

Creating Opportunities for Improved Communication and Cooperation

For example, Boulder, Colorado, is a national model for moderate density mixed-use development. To encourage new mixed-use and infill development the city developed mixed-use zoning districts and rezoned property consistent with the comprehensive plan and area plans. "We try to be fairly prescriptive in our zoning so developers can see exactly what the community is looking to have built. It also enables developers to avoid lengthy discretionary review."[81]

Mixed-use zoning underlies this 1999 development on Pearl Street in Boulder, CO
Photo credit: City of Boulder Planning Department

Another approach that proponents have taken to market density and other livable community concepts is to reframe them as "values" or "principles." One example of this approach is the tack that Aging Atlanta is taking in its work with communities to add senior housing projects to traditionally low-density neighborhoods that have a high concentration of older adults. Noting that 35 percent of older adults in Atlanta have lived in their residences for more than 30 years, Aging Atlanta wanted to communicate the message that it is important for communities to provide a variety of housing options so that older adults can downsize without having to move out of the neighborhoods in which they have lived for so long.

After successfully working with two counties and one city to change zoning ordinances to allow senior housing to be built, Aging Atlanta learned firsthand how difficult it is to "sell" senior housing, which would increase density in the community, to residents, local officials, and developers. Aging Atlanta decided to try a new approach. "When you use a word like 'density,' people react negatively and respond, 'We don't like density,'" explains Kathryn Lawler of Aging Atlanta. "But when you change the conversation to be about values, you get a lot more support."

[81] *Telephone interview with Susan Richstone*
Acting Long Range Planning Division Manager, City of Boulder Planning Department, January 8, 2008.

Instead of talking about density, says Lawler, it is better to talk about principles, such as "older people should be able to live near shopping." While someone might vocally disagree with "density," says Lawler, it is a lot harder to argue with good principles. "Someone who disagreed would actually have to say, 'No, I don't agree that older people should live near shopping,' and who would do that?"

To put this new approach into operation, a zoning designation proposed by Aging Atlanta for Cherokee County, Georgia, provides a density bonus to developers who incorporate senior housing components—or principles—into their developments. These design principles include "access to public facilities (library, fire or police departments, hospitals, other medical facilities, community or senior center)," "creative configuration of units to decrease maintenance, increase safety of residents and facilitate resident interaction," and "safe environments that promote walking (with sidewalks wide enough to accommodate walkers and wheelchairs)," among others. The more "principles" developers build into development plans, the more likely they are to receive support from neighborhood residents and density bonuses from the county.

Communication gaps also exist between agencies that may have common interests but rarely, if ever, talk to one another, let alone work together. Planning agencies that would seem to be natural partners often do not collaborate. One striking example is land use and transportation planning. Even though these two functions seem to be interdependent, "transportation and land use planning happen separately, and need to be better coordinated."[82] What causes this lack of coordination among agencies? The most frequently heard responses to this question include "silo thinking," entrenched mind-sets, and few, if any, incentives to change.[83]

[82] Marya Morris, Duncan Associates, personal communication.
[83] Nadejda Mishkovsky (ICMA), Brett van Akkern, Jon Burkhardt, and Martin Gould, personal communications.

Public Education and Involvement in Community Planning

Barriers

- Planning goes on without sufficient knowledge about and involvement of community residents.
- The public does not fully understand the aging boom on a community level and how it may affect decision-making and service delivery over time.
- Inadequate public engagement and participation in community planning affects possible options.

Creating Public Involvement Opportunities

In the preceding section, we mentioned that the planning office in Boulder, Colorado, created project prototype designs so that developers could see exactly what the community wanted to build. Obviously, the planning office had to have had a very good idea of what the community wanted to build before it could develop the prototype design. A key component of creating livable communities is ensuring "early and frequent involvement of all stakeholders to identify and address specific needs and concerns."[84] Without community participation and buy-in throughout the development of a project, the project may fail. Such participation must be inclusive and ensure that the people who are going to be most affected by the project are given a voice. In the brownfields redevelopment project in Redding, Connecticut (see Land Use), for example, more than 1,000 people, including citizens and local, regional, state, and federal stakeholders, participated in workshops that helped define the cleanup plan, historic preservation guidelines, and master plan for redevelopment.[85]

Local governments are generally much more savvy today than they used to be about involving the public in planning decisions and are using a variety of techniques to get public buy-in. For example, Aging Atlanta found that comprehensive planning in its community was going on without attention to the needs of older adults and their physical environment. To address this issue and inform planning, Aging Atlanta worked with a group of older adults in East Point, Georgia, just outside of Atlanta, to identify concerns with their community. Using maps and geographic information system (GIS) technology, older adults were able to describe their needs and concerns in the physical context of the community.[86] In Sacramento, California, more than 5,000 community members, elected officials, and business leaders shaped the future of the Sacramento region through a series of workshops, regional conferences, Web-based dialogue, and surveys over a two-year period to examine current land use and future growth patterns and to plan where and how the region should grow.[87]

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[84] Smart Growth Network and ICMA, *Getting to Smart Growth*, p. 78.
[85] U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "Livable Communities Awards 2005," available at www.epa.gov/livablecommunities.
[86] Kathryn Lawler, Aging Atlanta, personal communication.
[87] U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "Livable Communities Awards 2004," available from www.epa.gov/smartgrowth

Such "visioning" activities are focused on creating a view of what a community will look like in the future. Sometimes visioning entails a series of discussions that result in a description or story of how a community should look and feel. Often these activities are facilitated by planning professionals, who lead participants through exercises designed to encourage them to articulate their core values about community and growth in general, as well as their reactions to specific future development scenarios. In keeping with the "show, don't tell" concept, visioning exercises may use models, computer-generated simulations, or other aids to help participants envision the proposed development and how it will fit in and affect the rest of the community. For example, the city Planning Department of Pasadena, California, engaged citizens with a variety of tools to visualize changes in the city plan. They used moldable clay and cardboard boxes to show how development might look in a neighborhood. Using more modern technology, the Planning Department made its GIS data available to the public and used maps to talk with citizens about what they valued and what changes they liked and disliked to help develop the city's Central District Specific Plan.[88]

Another way for residents to make their voices heard is to participate in developing their communities' consolidated plans. A consolidated plan is a document written by a state or local government describing the housing needs of the low- and moderate-income residents, outlining strategies to meet those needs, and listing all resources available to implement the strategies. This document is required to receive Community Planning and Development funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, including funding under the Community Development Block Grants program. Plans normally cover a period of five years, are updated annually, and must include input from residents.

Whatever the technique, it is important to solicit citizen input throughout the development process, from the initial phases, when decisions about what to build are made, through the multiple phases of implementation. Ongoing citizen input can be achieved by establishing citizen advisory and/or neighborhood councils. For example, in the Rosslyn-Ballston Metro Corridor project in Arlington County, Virginia, community partnerships such as the Ballston Partnership, Clarendon Alliance, and Rosslyn Renaissance ensure full and active participation by citizens and businesses in nearly all public and private development and policy decisions. The county also solicits citizens' input through more than 40 board-appointed county commissions and nearly 60 neighborhood civic associations.[89]

An experiment in planning with maximum community involvement is currently underway in the Gulf region to guide rebuilding after Hurricane Katrina. After an attempt to develop a comprehensive plan for New Orleans failed, city and state officials decided to turn the planning process over to a local charity called the New Orleans Foundation, which received a $3.5 million grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to implement a unique planning process. The process involves groups representing more than 70 New Orleans neighborhoods and 15 planning teams chosen by the Foundation. The neighborhood groups interview the planning teams to get a sense of which ones they might want to work with to determine everything from housing placement to the width of sidewalks in their neighborhoods. After collaborating with the groups, the planning teams develop proposals for their neighborhoods. Eventually, the proposals will be combined to

[88] www.epa.gov/smartgrowth.
[89] www.epa.gov/smartgrowth.

form a single citywide master plan, but no new comprehensive guidelines are in place for the disparate planning teams to follow.

This unusual process has both supporters and detractors. Supporters, such as Mayor Ray Nagin, argue that it is an example of "democracy in action." Steven Bingler, the architect in charge of the planning process, agrees. "The planner's responsibility is not to make the decision," he says, "but to empower people to make decisions for themselves and their own communities." This is also an opportunity to involve thousands of people in an educational process that community residents rarely have the opportunity to enjoy. The give and take between planners and residents could result in an unusually informed populace, knowledgeable about architecture and planning issues.

Critics of the process say that it takes attention away from the more critical challenge of rebuilding the city's infrastructure, including levees, freeways, and the city's ecological footprint. Basic zoning requirements remain exactly the same as before the storm, despite the new challenges that the city faces. And "by planning ad hoc, the city is forfeiting a chance to consider how infrastructure could be used to bind communities—rich and poor, black and white—into a collective whole."[90]

It remains to be seen whether the pros of such intense citizen participation will outweigh the cons, but supporters and critics alike agree that rebuilding New Orleans is one of the most daunting urban reconstruction projects in American history and that this approach is one of the most unusual ways to address it.

[90] Nicolai Ouroussoff, "In New Orleans, each resident is master of plan to rebuild," *New York Times*, August 8, 2006.

Leadership

Barriers

- A lack of "political will" often hinders measures that would make the community more livable.

Ultimately, little headway can be made toward livable community goals without the political will few resources to support this work. As many of the examples in this report show, local, county, and state governments around the country are implementing policies to improve community livability for residents of all ages and abilities.

Some observers say that "politicians lead by following"; that is, they wait for a public upwelling before they decide to address a community issue. Aging Atlanta's effort to convince county legislators to amend zoning in order to allow senior housing to be built in neighborhoods of single-family homes is one example of this "bottom-up" approach. But some examples of livable community efforts start at the top, such as the sidewalk assessment and construction project championed by Mayor Purcell in Nashville.

Leadership Opportunities Realized

Sound government-initiated policies can help remove barriers to livable community goals. Such policies set the stage for stakeholders from the private and voluntary sectors to get involved and, in some cases, to work jointly with officials to develop livable community projects. For example, in the 1990s, officials from Suffolk County and the town of Brookhaven, New York, together with the Long Island Housing Partnership, developed a plan to turn around North Bellport, the most blighted community in the county. The officials found that one major obstacle to developing affordable housing was the escalating cost of land. To address this obstacle, the county began transferring land seized in tax foreclosures to local towns. Land transfers are a common trend in cities but are unusual in suburban areas such as Suffolk County, because the problem of affordable housing traditionally has been regarded as a uniquely urban issue. To recycle the land, the towns contracted with Habitat for Humanity, the Long Island Housing Partnership, and local builders to build affordable homes. Together, the organizations built more than 100 affordable homes in North Bellport, and a new 20-home subdivision is in the planning stage. The county's policies have not only helped begin revitalization of the community but have also spurred additional grassroots-initiated efforts to increase the availability of affordable housing.[91]

Taking steps to improve livability takes dedicated resources and the support of all sectors in the community. When public officials lead or endorse livable community efforts, it is more likely that others will follow.

[91] Valerie Cotsalas, "Instead of Blight, Low-Price Houses," *New York Times*, June 25, 2006.