



Community Development

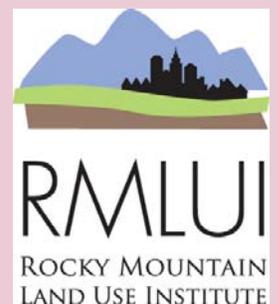
Joe Holmes & James van Hemert

The Rocky Mountain Land Use Institute

Sustainable Community Development Code

Research Monologue Series

Community Identity & Governance



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About the Research Monologue Series

The Sustainable Community Development Code, an initiative of the Rocky Mountain Land Use Institute, represents the next generation of local government development codes. Environmental, social, and economic sustainability are the central guiding principles of the code. Supporting research for the code is represented by a series of research monologues commissioned, presented and discussed at a symposium held at the University of Denver in September of 2007. RMLUI and the University of Denver's Sturm College of Law extend its gratitude to the authors of the papers who have provided their talents and work pro bono in the service of the mission of RMLUI and the stewardship of the creation.

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Cover photo: cozy outdoor seating at the Bitter Creek Ale House on Boise's Eighth Street. Photo by James van Hemert.

About the Authors

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James van Hemert, AICP, is the Executive Director of the Rocky Mountain Land Use Institute at the University of Denver where he is responsible for the institute's conferences, seminars, publications, and research endeavors. He has published articles and books on urban planning, Western rural and town land use patterns, the development review process, and development impact fees. He is currently leading the Institute's Sustainable Community Development Code (Zoning) initiative. He is a frequent speaker at regional and national conferences and is the President Elect of the Colorado Chapter of the American Planning Association. James received a B.A. from Calvin College (Michigan) and an M.A. in Regional Planning from the University of Waterloo (Ontario, Canada). He has a wide range of planning and community development experience in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors and has worked in the Toronto region, the Philippines, Mississippi, and Colorado.

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In today's post-industrial world communities are formed intentionally around shared intrinsic values and interests and no longer limited to family blood lines or cultural heritage.¹ An essential component of a strong, vibrant community is the presence of desirable social hubs where people can come together and interact in meaningful ways. Whether it is a church, school, coffeehouse, bookstore, or park these places of social gathering connect people in an increasingly urbanized world.

Renowned author and urban sociologist, Ray Oldenburg, has famously called such locations "third places," distinguishing such environments from the traditional locales of the home and the workplace (the "first" and "second" place respectively).² Others have referred to the process of creating attractive public places such as public squares, parks, and downtown areas as "placemaking."³ While the phraseology is secondary, there seems to be consensus in the planning community that third places provide an invaluable resource that increase social capital and interaction within a given community. As such, land use and zoning regulations should be fashioned in a manner that encourages the development of the community through "placemaking."

In many ways, Americans have created a subjective "hierarchy of places" devised for personal solace, companionship, romance, domesticity, "neighborliness," community and civic life.⁴ Over time, places develop a "sense of place" for residents, as well as visitors, that stems from history, geography, and contemporary place in the larger world. This sense of place shapes residents' personal identities and degree of "rootedness" in that particular place.⁵

Americans presently devote a majority of their time to relatively isolated, private areas. For both children and adults, studies show that social and active time has been replaced by watching television, playing video games, and surfing the internet. Studies also show that these activities are tied to inactivity and isolation which may lead to depression, obesity and other related diseases. Creating third places that encourage physical activity and draw people together socially can play a significant role in curtailing this decline in public health.⁶

In the past, churches and places of worship grounded communities and performed many civic functions that we now associate with local governments. While many places of worship continue to perform valuable social roles, such as caring for the homeless, promoting environmental agendas, and raising awareness on a myriad of social concerns, such places are not presently seen as community anchors. In fact, the United States Congress perceived local governments as often being hostile towards religious centers and, as a result, passed the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA) – essentially making it easier for churches and other religious institutions to avoid government restriction of their activities through zoning regulation.⁷

While there may be a perceived hostility towards places of worship, some cities have welcomed the development of new religious institutions into their communities. In Chico, California, for example, Bidwell Presbyterian Church is currently a key player in a new \$750-million, 250-acre New Urbanist community of 1,500 houses, apartments, businesses, schools, and a baseball field three miles south of downtown Chico. While the church is a fixture in the community, its original facilities had proven inadequate to meet increased membership demands. As a result, the church was in need of additional facilities. Rather than building a stand-alone church with an expansive parking lot, as was first considered, Bidwell Presbyterian opted to occupy a sidewalk-accessible, two-acre plot right in the heart of this new neighborhood. Rather than a field of parking, the church will share nearby public parking facilities with local businesses. This is not expected to be a problem as peak demand for church parking occurs during different times than peak demand for typical commercial parking. Moreover, the church hopes that its central location will encourage people to walk to and from services and community functions. Ultimately, both the developers and Bidwell Presbyterian hope that the Church, with its fellowship hall, classrooms, offices, courtyard, sanctuary, and outdoor arcade, will serve as a natural hub for the new neighborhood. Additionally, Bidwell Presbyterian is planning on opening some of the facilities for civic and cultural events not associated with the church.⁸

Schools may also serve as third places. Schools can achieve this status by effectively integrating with the community or by extending the learning environment to use the community's full range of resources. Schools may implement longer or later hours to permit senior citizens to use the gym and health facilities or to allow immigrants to take evening English classes after work. Student learning, school effectiveness, family engagement, and community vitality mark notable improvements in areas where school serve as third places.⁹



Neighbors and friends converse at Kaladi's Coffee in Denver, Colorado. Photo: James van Hemert.

Coffeehouses, public squares, and commercial districts can also provide people with central areas to socialize. Kaladi Brothers Coffee, located near the University of Denver, in Colorado, has proven to be a great local hangout for residents and students. In the early hours of the day, locals can be heard socializing and discussing everything from politics to religion. During the afternoons, students take over, often studying or discussing the day's events with their friends. Shaded seating and a prime location, along with Kaladi Brothers' unique brews, make it a social center for the neighboring community and students.¹⁰

A new social environment is the goal of the recent mixed-use project being phased into the former site of Denver's Stapleton International Airport. At build out, this community is expected to have 8,000 houses, 4,000 apartments, four schools, and 2 million square feet of retail. By the end of the development, as many as 30,000 new residents may be housed in the Stapleton area. Additionally, more than 1,000 acres have been set aside for parks and open spaces.¹¹ One specific development has proven to be an exemplary public place. The East 29th Avenue Town Center provides a mix of commercial uses and restaurants with housing and open areas that has resulted in a truly successful third place. With an ample supply of shaded, outdoor seating, the East 29th Avenue Town



Apartment homes surrounding Founders' Green and the East 29th Avenue Town Center.
www.stapletondenver.com/homes/apartments/botanica.asp

Center is both safe and welcoming. Fountains and play areas for children in the adjacent park area called Founders' Green make the center a perfect destination for families. A coffeehouse, ice cream parlor, and pub broaden the appeal to include people of all ages.¹² Additionally, June 2007 marked the beginning of the Stapleton Farmers Market, a weekly farmers market that serves as a bustling hub for residents and visitors alike.¹³ Located next door to a supermarket and

pharmacy, the East 29th Avenue Town Center capitalizes on the limited amount of housing that has already been constructed and will likely provide a wonderful third place for the continued residential expansion in the area.

Farmer's markets, like Stapleton's, have enjoyed a revival in the last 15-20 years. These markets serve as a community focal point, a gathering place for neighbors and friends to converse while choosing tomatoes or a loaf of bread for supper. The presence of such community gathering spaces apart from home or work are part of the glue that binds people together, that transforms faceless "anyplaces" into true communities¹⁴. Similarly, community gardens and dog parks can serve as third places. These places offer conviviality and an opportunity for the enjoyment of other's company.¹⁵

Unlike Stapleton's town center, or a local coffeehouse, shopping malls do not serve as valuable third places. Malls are essentially commercial spaces, rather than community places. Shopping malls are intended to be centrally located and serve a multitude of people from outlying developments within a region. Rather than familiar faces and commonplace interaction, shopping malls are filled with strangers and independent objectives. Third places, on the other hand, seek to promote interaction, familiarity and a sense of community. Effective third places are, in effect, the antithesis of shopping malls.¹⁶

Eighth Street, in downtown Boise, Idaho, illustrates that a city center can serve as both a place to work and a great place to socialize. Coffeehouses, restaurants, and pubs adorn the walkways. Abundant outdoor seating and blocked off



Cozy outdoor seating at the Bitter Creek Ale House on Boise's Eighth Street. Photo by James van Hemert.

streets have led some to describe the downtown as having a "slightly European feel."¹⁷ The City has also successfully connected cultural facilities with a system of footpaths and bike paths.¹⁸ Similarly, in Hyde Park, located in the North End district of downtown Boise, the City has encouraged pedestrian access and

historic preservation through limits on parking. Currently, the City prohibits off-site parking and parking garages. Additionally, the City limits the supply of parking by placing relatively low limits on off-street parking requirements. For example, restaurants in the Hyde Park area are restricted to providing one parking space per twenty seats for restaurants with 0 to 40 seats, one parking space per ten seats for restaurants with 41 to 80 seats, and one space per two seats in restaurants with more than 81 seats. Retail uses are also limited. Retail of less than 750 square feet is limited to one parking space, retail 751 to 2,000 square feet in size is limited to one space per 300 square feet, and retail over 2,000 square feet is limited to one space per 200 square feet.¹⁹ These maximum parking requirements have not hindered activity in the Hyde Park area as the local restaurants, bars, and shops are striving as valuable places of social interaction for locals and visitors alike.

Intentional programmed “third places” such as farmer’s markets, community gardens, and dog parks can also play a role in building community when development codes are supportive. Sidewalks should be built in a manner that encourages outdoor seating and gathering. Zoning can encourage movement and activity over uniformity and sterility. Overly strict and misguided loitering laws should be relaxed or eliminated.

“Third places” perform a socially valuable role of connecting people and communities. Whether a church, coffeehouse, or collection of shops and restaurants, people need places outside their home and work where they can feel comfortable. Successful public places are accessible and well-connected to other important places in the area. They are comfortable and inviting; people are drawn to participate in activities there, and they are sociable places where people will want to visit again and again.²⁰

Potential sustainability measures:

- Conduct community surveys to identify places that are seen as inviting and measure community comfort in frequenting local “third places”
- Use mapping technologies such as GIS and Google Earth to identify and map successful third places and make this information accessible to citizens of the community
- Community surveys of successful places in a given community
- Comfort in frequenting a local “third place”

Land Use Code Strategies

Removing Obstacles

- Replace minimum parking requirements with maximum parking requirement to promote pedestrian-friendly third places

- Eliminate overly restrictive barriers to places of worship in the siting process
- Religious institutions should be allowed in all zoning district by right and activity; multi-use facilities should be expected to comply with local zoning codes

Incentives

- Provide tax incentives to developers who build mixed-use developments in areas that are perceived by local residents to be undesirable and abandoned
- Encourage the building of places of worship in residential areas through less restrictive regulations
- Density bonuses can be used to encourage the building of third places

Regulations

- Require developers to build areas that are perceived as inviting (such as parks with ample outdoor, shaded seating)
- Religious institutions should be allowed in all zoning district by right and activity; multi-use facilities should be expected to comply with local zoning codes

Strategic Success Factors

- Programmed events such as festivals and farmer's markets enhance the likelihood of success.
- Conduct community surveys to identify places that are seen as inviting and measure community comfort in frequenting local "third places"
- Use mapping technologies such as GIS and Google Earth to identify and map successful "third places" and make this information accessible to citizens of the community

Notes

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