

Five Stars for Urban Design: Rating and Scoring TNDs

There are a number of compelling reasons to rate neighborhood design. Education and persuasion are the reasons identified by many planners who are interested in neighborhood rating as a teaching tool. Developers and real estate professionals see recognition and marketing as a benefit of ratings.

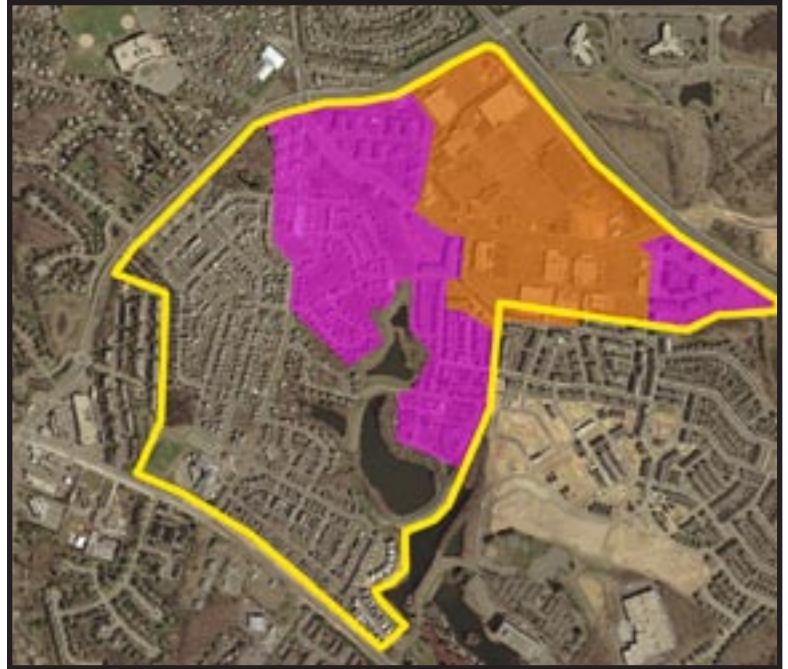
In recent years, researchers have become more interested in urban form and its relationships to pollution, energy use, health, finances, etc. Compared to standard metrics such as density, neighborhood ratings provide a more nuanced representation of urban form and thus may support better research results.

Policy applications have perhaps the most impact, but also carry the most controversy because they could involve regulation and coercion. Certain planning commissions and agencies already give preference to applications that aim for LEED certification; some intend to treat neighborhood ratings in the same manner.

Many tools are available to evaluate neighborhood-scale development and smart growth. Rating systems may involve checklists, scorecards, surveys, performance measures or other methods. Results can range from completely intuitive and subjective to utterly precise and objective. No single system is perfect for all situations, and the appropriate choice depends on the application and audience.

Over the course of several years, the process of evaluating developments for the Town Paper's list of TNDs has focused and systematized my set of rating standards. A guidebook to applying the standards, titled "TND Design Rating Standards," is available online at the Town Paper website (<http://www.tndtownpaper.com/rating.htm>).

Continued on Page 2



Graphic by Laurence Aurbach

The Town Center Proximity standard applied to Kentlands in Gaithersburg, Md. The town center (orange area) plus the one-quarter mile pedestrian shed (purple area) cover 60 percent of Kentlands' built area. The score is three stars out of five.

APA's NUD and CNU's Planners' Task Force: Potential Collaboration

Pasadena was the site of the 13th Congress for New Urbanism (CNU) in June. The counterpart of APA's NUD is CNU's Planners Task Force, which is chaired by Jennifer Hurley of Pennsylvania. At the June meeting the Planners Task Force members, many of whom also belong to the NUD, identified their work for the upcoming year. This article addresses the most salient overlap of our respective efforts.

To begin, the purpose of APA's NUD is to provide planners, public officials, and other decision makers with the information, support, and tools needed to eliminate restrictive conventional development regulations and allow New Urbanism patterns to be incorporated in all communities. A strategy to fulfill that purpose is promoting NU land development regulations, or codes, as standard practice rather than accepting New Urbanism development proposals as a variant.

Continued on Page 3

APA

IN THIS ISSUE

Five Stars for Urban Design
LEED-ND & Other Scorecards
APA/CNU Collaboration
Book Review: Design First
Division News
Calendar of Events & Happenings

NEW URBANISM IN PRACTICE

2005-2006 New Urbanism
Division Officers

Chair
Marie York
myork@fau.edu

Vice-Chair
Mahender Vasandani
mgv@golandvision.biz

Secretary/Treasurer
Nathan Bilger
nathanb@westport-home.com

Newsletter Editor
Suzanne S. Rhees, AICP, CNU
suzanne_rhees@urscorp.com

Newsletter Associate Editor
Murphy Antoine, Jr., AIA, AICP
mantoine@tortigallaschk.com

New Urbanism in Practice, published quarterly, is the official newsletter of the New Urbanism Division of the American Planning Association. We welcome articles, letters, suggestions, and information for inclusion in the newsletter. Please forward your submissions to our Editor, Suzanne Rhees. The next deadline for the submission of articles is October 31, 2005.

New Urbanism in Practice along with other information about the New Urbanism Division is found online at:

<http://www.planning.org/divisions/>

Division members are encouraged to sign up for the Division list-serve at <http://list.planning.org>

Copyright © 2005 by the American Planning Association, New Urbanism Division

Continued from Page 1

TND Rating System

The goals of the TND Design Rating Standards are to:

- Evaluate the most important, critical elements of urban design.
- Maximize ease of use, minimize time and cost.
- Make standards transparent as possible, with results that are as replicable as possible.
- Provide detailed, consistent guidelines for deriving numerical scores.
- Be able to directly compare developments.
- Make distinctions between TND, hybrid and conventional developments.

The system uses nine basic standards. The first five standards are more objective in nature, with mathematical methods determining scores, while the last four standards involve more subjective judgments. All ratings are on a scale of 1 to 5 stars, with 5 stars being equivalent to a well-designed, early 20th-century, urban neighborhood in the U.S. The standards are:

Prerequisites: Gated communities are disqualified from consideration, as are entirely age- or organization-restricted developments. (The latter may be more properly evaluated as Districts instead of TNDs.) Scale is also important: The smaller a development, the fewer full standards may apply. Forty dwellings and two blocks is the minimum size. Updating the ratings as construction progresses is a necessity.

1. **Housing choice:** Probability that any two dwellings will be different in type or size. This standard uses the Simpson Diversity Measure, a calculation commonly used by ecologists to measure biodiversity.
2. **Mixed use:** Number of categories represented, from a defined list of fourteen uses.
3. **Connectivity:** Intersections per square mile (or square kilometer). For measuring the ease and efficiency of travel, as well as the long-term adaptability of the street and block pattern, intersection density works



Housing choice in Kentlands. The community offers a full range of housing options, from small accessory units to large, detached residences. Kentlands' score for this standard is 5 stars out of 5. All images by Laurence Aurbach

Continued on Page 3

Continued from Page 2

- as well or better than the links-to-nodes ratio. (The links-to-nodes ratio is discussed at length in “Planning for Street Connectivity,” APA PAS #315.)
4. External connections: Number of entrance/exit points per foot (or meter) of perimeter length. Perimeter segments where connections are not feasible, such as waterfronts, are exempted.
 5. Proximity: Percent of land within walking distance of a town/neighborhood center, schools, parks and transit. Walking distance is defined differently for each of these uses.
 6. Location: Evaluation of the development’s location in the regional context. Infill generally scores highest, but greenfield developments may score well if they are approved as part of a good regional plan.
 7. Streetscapes: Evaluation of overall quality of public frontages, private frontages and vehicular lanes. This standard relies heavily on DPZ’s SmartCode; the upcoming ITE/CNU thoroughfare manual may also prove to be an authoritative reference.
 8. Civic space: Evaluation of overall quality of civic space. This includes public gathering places as well as large-scale aesthetic characteristics such as topographical relationships, viewsheds and terminated vistas
 9. Architectural aesthetics: Evaluation of overall quality of architectural exteriors. This standard purposefully avoids any specification of style, but references the historical vernacular context, climatic and geographic contexts, as well as proportions and detailing.

Because there is a wide range of opinions about which elements are most important, I have provided a method for weighting elements. So, for example, a designer may believe that the formation of urban space is the most important factor in good urban design. To reflect that in my system, one would assign a high weight to the “Civic Space” standard, and the final result would better represent the designer’s priorities. Or, an activist says that transit access is the most important element with respect to environmental impacts. In that example, a higher weight can be given to the “Transit Proximity” standard.

The U.S. Green Building Council is currently developing the LEED Neighborhood Development rating system (See LEED for Neighborhood Developments on pg 5). I have been working with the committee, and LEED-ND now incorporates portions of the TND Design Rating Standards. My rating system has benefited from the suggestions of several reviewers, and has been refined to the point where it is now in the testing phase to verify the validity of its results.

The Belmont Bay Town Center in Woodbridge, Va., was formally evaluated using a previous version of the design standards. The evaluation was published in New Towns as “Belmont Bay: Community Critique.” (http://www.tndtownpaper.com/Volume6/belmont_bay.htm)

The TND Design Rating System focuses primarily on design elements. It can be thought of as a module, and easily could be combined with modules that address environmental, financial and social factors. A combination of all such modules would result in a comprehensive neighborhood rating system that addresses the full range of topics in the CNU Charter.

Laurence Aurbach is an editor, researcher and graphic designer based in Hyattsville, Maryland. Comments and suggestions about the rating system are welcome; please send your communications to translucent@spamacop.net

Continued from Page 1

Potential APA/CNU Collaboration

Meanwhile, CNU’s Planners Task Force has adopted the major project of promoting New Urbanism through comprehensive planning and documenting NU innovations through practice.

Thus our two organizations are looking to coordinate and leverage our efforts. We are looking for appropriate and effective venues to achieve this, the first being to determine if we can merge APA’s NU listserv with that of the CNU Planners Task Force. These listservs are proprietary property of our respective organizations, so we will have to figure out how to achieve this end while respecting organizational policies. If you have other ideas as to how we can combine our skills and talent, please let us know. After all, our missions are similar, our memberships overlap, and we are all passionate about community design.

Marie L. York, AICP, NUD Chair

