Great Streets

Key element: Connectivity – linked to a larger street network

Good planning – sensitive traffic calming measures, thoughtful placement of street lights, signs of green infrastructure

Requirements for Great Streets:

- Places for People to Walk with some Leisure
  o Functions of streets taken for granted
  o Gaining access to abutting uses
  o Getting from one place to another
  o Experience and meet people on foot – not in private car
  o Involved with the urban environment
  o Essential purpose of street = sociability
  o Leisurely, safe walking
  o Walkways that permit people to walk at varying paces
  o Leisurely pace – neither a sense of crowding nor being alone and safe, primarily from vehicles
  o Curbs and sidewalks – most common ways of separating and protecting pedestrians from vehicles
  o Trees added may bring a sense of safety
  o No physical separation at all between vehicle and pedestrian paths, that is, no curbs, can be a better solution, particularly on crowded, small streets; let cars and people mix
    o Auto forced to move at the pedestrian’s pace
- Physical Comfort
  o Warmth or sunlight
  o Protection from elements without trying to avoid or negate the natural environment
  o Shelter from the wind
  o People understand and respect comfort
- Definition
  o Boundaries – usually walls
  o Communicate clearly where the edges of the street are
- Sets street apart
  - Keep eyes on and in the street
  - Defined two ways
    - Vertical – height of buildings, walls, trees, lights, etc.
    - Horizontal – length of and spacing between whatever is doing the defining
  - Human scale – 3 story height, 36 ft. width, street width 72 ft.
  - Intimate scale – 2 story height, 24 ft. width, street width 48 ft.
  - Trees may be as important as buildings in street definition
    - Spacing of buildings along a street
    - Height, setbacks, architectural quality, fences, etc.
    - Tighter spacing = more effective

- Qualities that Engage the Eyes
  - Eyes move – great streets require physical characteristics that help the eyes do what they want to do
  - Surface changes, signs, people, details, architecture, etc.

- Transparency
  - Transparency at edges – where public realm meets private realm
  - Sense of what is behind – invitation to view what is behind street walls
  - Usually doors and windows
  - Commercial – entice customers
  - Entryways
  - Windows with blinds or drapes = thick masonry wall
  - Not always the case in residential areas
  - Blank walls and garage doors = people far removed
  - Blank-walled passageways = see to the area beyond

- Complementarily
  - Buildings get along with each other – height, setback, but variety
  - Rarely big jumps or drops
  - Development occurred all at once or short period
    - Variables – materials, color, cornice lines, building sizes, entrances, porches, overhangs

- Maintenance
  - Cleanliness, smooth, no potholes
  - Care of trees, materials, buildings, etc.
  - Makes a difference in comfort
  - Public maintenance vs. private maintenance

- Quality of Construction and Design
  - Materials and workmanship
  - Appropriate uses of material
  - Cost issue – better quality often means higher cost
    - Care and maintenance
Qualities that Contribute: Not Required, but can Enhance

- Trees
  - Must be appropriate (species, climate, etc.)
  - For many people, these are the most important characteristic
  - Provide oxygen and shade for comfort
  - “Green”
  - Transparent, but distinct edge – safety barrier for pedestrians
  - Spacing: 15 to 25 feet apart
  - Avoid street corners by 40 to 50 feet – sight lines/auto safety
  - Maintenance important

- Beginnings and Endings
  - Boundary
  - Often monuments or gateways to another street/area

- Many Buildings Rather than Few; Diversity
  - Vertical lines
  - Size and scale
  - Physical diversity – architecture
  - More buildings = more owners = economy = responsibility
  - Social diversity – uses and activities – building community

- Special Design Features: Details
  - Gates, fountains, benches, kiosks, paving, lights, signs, canopies
  - Street lights – form lines – under 20 feet
  - Paving patterns
  - Benches – help people stay on street = rest, conversation, waiting, etc.
  - Complaint – attract homeless/beggars
  - Awning canopies – intimate spaces
  - Details are special seasoning of a great street

- Places
  - Plazas, parks, open spaces
  - Provide stopping places, pauses, reference points along path

- Accessibility
  - Getting from one point to another
  - Getting to the street with ease
  - Designed with handicapped people in mind – blind, wheelchair, etc.

- Density Helps
  - Matter of urban policy – designers may influence them
  - Having many people live along the street or nearby
  - “24 hour” streets – populated with a human presence at all times
  - Net residential density of 15 dwelling units per acre can achieve urban communities

- Diversity
  - Physically and economically diverse
- Bring different people for different purposes
  - Length
    - Come in all lengths
    - Sustain visual interest and diversity
  - Slope
    - Changes in elevation, but not too steep
    - Increases views and adds drama
  - Parking
    - Has to do with accessibility
    - People in automobiles would like to park nearest to their destinations – directly in front is the best
    - Merchants want them to
    - If all parking moved to the rear – stores would re-orient to the rear
    - Garages are often too expensive, but may work
    - On-street parking – traffic calming – meters bring money
    - Driveways cause cuts in the pedestrian paths
  - Contrast
    - Contrast in design can set one street apart from another
    - Shape, size, regularity
    - Design of the street itself that makes the difference
  - Time
    - Age and evolution
    - Sense of history

Street and City Patterns

- Street and block patterns reflect differences among cities beyond those of scale, complexity, available choices, and the nature of space
- They relate to the time period when the city was built, to topography, to different cultures, to city functions or purposes, to design or political philosophies, and to technological demands
- They are settings within which great and not so great streets are found
- Need to know settings in order to determine great streets and be able to locate them
- Layout of streets and blocks contributes to or helps determine a great street’s special quality
- Knowledge of physical context – better understand differences in streets, and also understand the difficulty in pinpointing what it is that makes a particular street stand out
- Comparison of the same size at the same scale (one square mile)

Rest of Text should be supported in posters