

**SENSE-OF-PLACE IDEALS
IN SMALL TOWN PLANNING**

by

Rebecca A. Mattson

Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degrees of

Master in City Planning

and

Bachelor of Science in Economics

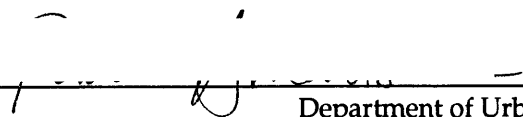
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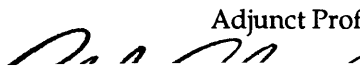
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Rebecca A. Mattson

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ABSTRACT

Rural towns hold a special appeal which has been luring 'cityfolk' residents and tourists for the past 20 years. With new growth, this very attractiveness is often quietly suffocated and can eventually disappear altogether. This quality, part architecture, part landscape and mostly community spirit, can be called its 'sense of place'; it is a fragile resource which transcends mere aesthetics or preservation. It is the fabric of settings, perceptions and interactions within a place.

Exploring and legitimizing feelings of sense of place can protect a community from being overrun by growth. A working definition of sense of place is proposed, with three levels of criteria: physical landscape, community dynamics and authenticity. Issues of practicality, differing values and legality, which may arise in determining sense of place, are explored in light of these criteria.

Leelanau Township, Michigan (pop. 1600) is presented as an example of a small community facing the pressures of growth. Leelanau serves as a point of discussion to help explain aspects of sense of place, to recognize what is at stake and to discuss the role of sense of place ideals in small town planning.

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Philip B. Herr

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the planners, official and otherwise,
of the Village of Northport, Leelanau Township and
Leelanau County, who helped supply this thesis
with insight and character.

Special thanks goes out to Kalin Johnson and Kathy Policoro,
both of Leelanau Township.

I wish you all the best of luck in maintaining your special
sense of place which inspired me to write this thesis.
Here is my contribution to the cause.

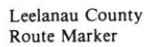
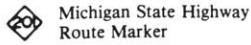
Sense-of-Place Ideals In Small Town Planning

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Leelanau County Planning Department Leelanau Township Leelanau County, Michigan

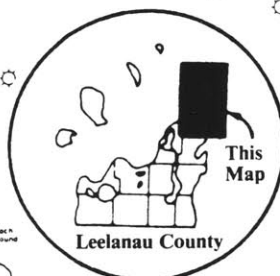
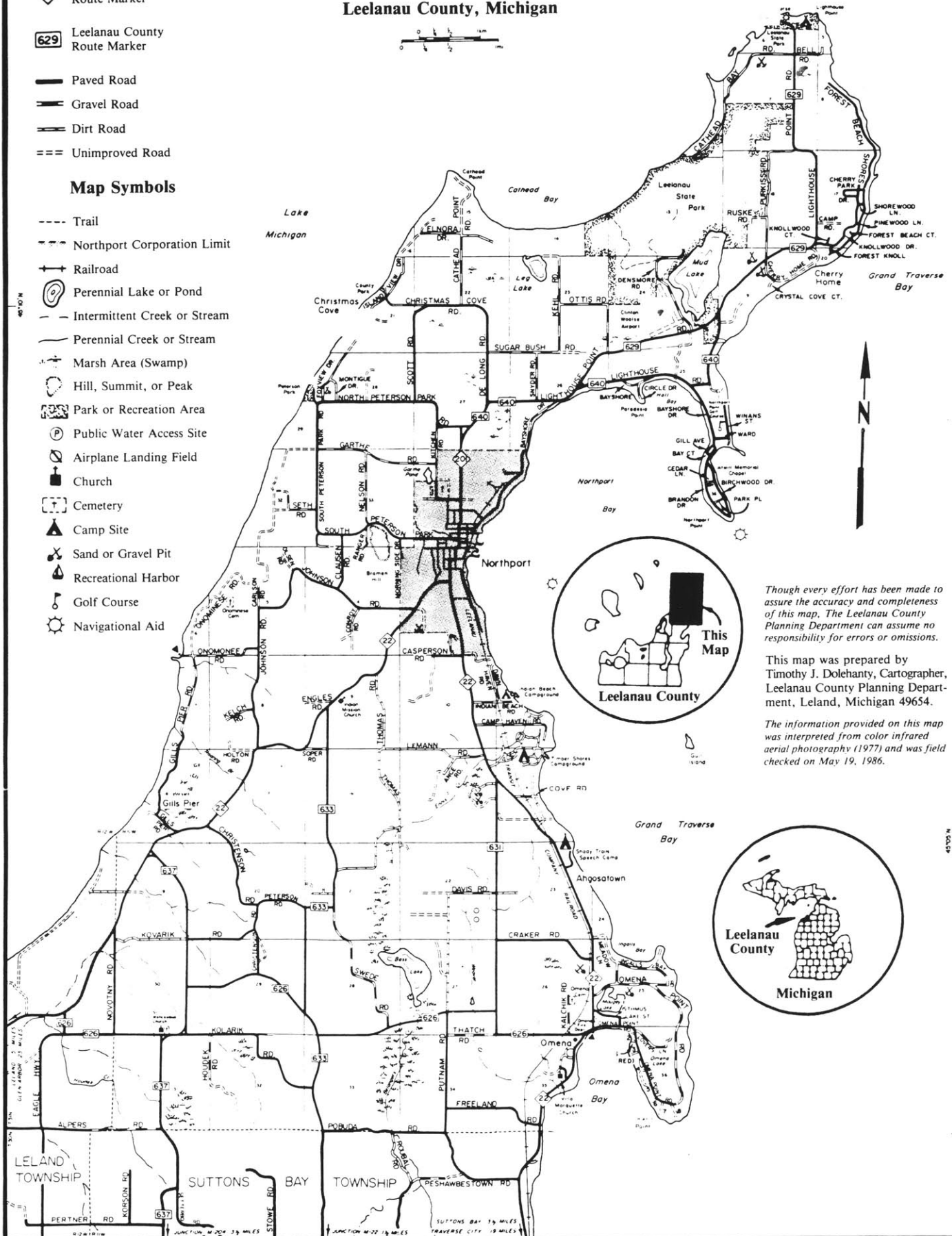
Road System



- Paved Road
- Gravel Road
- Dirt Road
- Unimproved Road

Map Symbols

- Trail
- Northport Corporation Limit
- Railroad
- Perennial Lake or Pond
- Intermittent Creek or Stream
- Perennial Creek or Stream
- Marsh Area (Swamp)
- Hill, Summit, or Peak
- Park or Recreation Area
- Public Water Access Site
- Airplane Landing Field
- Church
- Cemetery
- Camp Site
- Sand or Gravel Pit
- Recreational Harbor
- Golf Course
- Navigational Aid



Though every effort has been made to assure the accuracy and completeness of this map, The Leelanau County Planning Department can assume no responsibility for errors or omissions.

This map was prepared by Timothy J. Dolehanty, Cartographer, Leelanau County Planning Department, Leland, Michigan 49654.

The information provided on this map was interpreted from color infrared aerial photography (1977) and was field checked on May 19, 1986.



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Anyone who has ever walked around a small village at suppertime on a spring night and heard the sounds of children playing in the park and the choir practicing in the church and watched the mist rising from the lake and heard the redwing blackbirds calling to their mates will know what I mean when I say there is something about village life that calls out to one, that makes one know that down through the ages we have all lived in villages and there's a gene for village life in most of us.

Although village life is by its very nature life writ small, life lived on a Currier and Ives plate, and can be cloying and claustrophobic at times, there are other times when the very sweetness, simplicity, and peacefulness to be found there are some of the rare, lovely things we are offered in this life.

Kathleen Stocking
Letters from the Leelanau (1990)

INTRODUCTION

Small towns embody not only a physical settlement form but also a way of life. Simplicity, family, tradition, neighborliness, integrity, respect for the land and other traits are woven into a small town setting. Sense of place is this collective impression of a place, of what its physical and 'personality' traits portray. A small town's sense of place, then, goes beyond how buildings look or how many trees there are; it is how freely one breathes, why one feels 'at home' and what makes a place inviting and memorable.

A sense of place radiates from a small town's streets, storefronts and people. From the viewpoint of a person driving along a rural road, a town appears to subtly organize itself, congregate, and then trickle back down into countryside once again. Buildings sit comfortably along the length of 'Main Street.' People often stop to talk to one another on the sidewalk. A good number of businesses have been around so long that they have become community institutions, nobly showing every year of their age. Water laps peacefully on a shoreline or riverbank, perhaps, or winds sweep gently across grain fields outside of town. The pace and atmosphere are simple, relaxed. Residents often feel a deep appreciation and identification with their particular town, much of which can be attributed to its sense of place.

The attractiveness of any small town can be, at the same time, its nemesis. With substantial growth in a community, slowly but surely the appeal can be suffocated and may eventually disappear altogether. Even with the best planning, a town's character and meaning can slip through its fingers. For the past quarter century, as small towns have slowly been 'homogenized' away, people have begun to take a closer look at the effects upon their towns and their lifestyles. Unfortunately, by the time a town takes the initiative to discover its sense of place attributes, often a great deal of its character and uniqueness has already been lost.

Exploring and legitimizing perceptions of sense of place, in advance, can be a defense against being overrun by growth; by protecting the core of a community, the shell may change but the soul remains intact and healthy. This suggests a new approach to planning. As an important community resource, sense of place can be discussed, discovered and protected in order to survive.

If places are indeed a fundamental aspect of man's existence in the world, if they are sources of security and identity for individuals and for groups of people, then it is important that the means of experiencing, creating and maintaining significant places are not lost ... without such knowledge it will not be possible to create and preserve the places that are the significant contexts of our lives. ¹

Planning is just beginning to reach out to "create and preserve" the aspects which contribute to sense of place. Ideals of sense of place can be highly subjective, but arguably no more so than ideals of aesthetics once were before they entered the realm of planning. With concerted efforts and attention, sense of place ideals can become useful tools for planning for a community.

Growth which recognizes and respects the unique qualities of a community has the potential to protect or even enhance sense of place. This may seem to be a paradox to many small town residents who, often justifiably, believe that growth can only be generic and detrimental. A sense of place approach argues, and encourages, otherwise.

DEFINING SENSE OF PLACE

To begin, a small town must recognize, and define, those specific qualities that contribute to their community's sense of place. People often have trouble describing these qualities in concrete terms; this leads to their vulnerability. At the threat of development, residents and small town officials may have difficulty pinning down just what is at stake. Without having an effective understanding, agreement and jargon, or in other words, the "verbal ammunition," to describe their sense of place, residents risk losing their town's unique character.² To gain an understanding, to be able to promote and preserve sense of place, it needs to be viewed and studied just as intently as economic growth, historic preservation or environmental protection.

This calls for establishing a working definition of sense of place. I offer a definition with three layers of meaning, where each layer is increasingly subjective and therefore more challenging to incorporate into planning. The first of the three layers is *Landscape*, which consists of the physical surroundings, both man made and natural. Physical resources are tangible and concrete, and are therefore the most readily defined (and protected). Examples of landscape ideals used in policy tools include master plans, design guidelines and regional advisory plans. They provide the framework upon

¹ Relph, Edward. *Place and Placelessness*. London: Pion Limited, 1976, p. 6.

² Oldenburg, Ray. *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Hangouts and How They Get You Through the Day*. New York: Paragon House, 1989, p. xii.

which sense of place is built. Chapter 2 explores this realm, particularly how the built environment and the natural environment function, and how the two balance with each other.

Chapter 3 outlines the second layer, *Community*, which is a particularly important resource in small towns. A strong part of one's identity in a small town consists of



Northport Village Post Office, on a late winter afternoon

knowing many of the people who live there and interacting with them on a regular basis. The configuration and elements of a town can contribute to, or discourage, these links in a small town. Looking at community reveals the importance of *people interacting with other people*, and too few efforts in planning have been made to secure this precious resource. However, community is currently one of the hottest topics about 'the human condition' in fields ranging from sociology to environmental psychology to environmental design; this is encouraging for innovations to be transferred into the field of planning.

Chapter 4 debates the third and most subjective realm: *Authenticity*. In order for sense of place to survive in the long run, a small town must be sincere in its design and in its relation to its townspeople; it must remain authentic. It cannot succumb to mere consumerism and nice facades, but must continue to serve a purpose for all types of

residents. In this way, a small town remains 'vernacular,' a place which grows out of the uses, meanings and conditions of the local people. Authenticity, as argued here, sets forth two criteria, the first of *appropriate design* and the second of *genuine use*. Difficult to define, authenticity may arguably be the most important factor to identify. It is a town's integrity, serving as both a goal and an underlying method.

TRANSLATING SENSE OF PLACE IDEALS INTO PLANNING

Discussion of sense of place is in itself one aim. Translating the resulting ideals into planning, the realm which can affect the place, must be a second aim. How can the ideals be put to work? How can planning practice benefit from such perspectives? What concrete steps can be taken to preserve a small town's sense of place? Determining traits of sense of place is an intermediate step toward a larger goal: maintaining them.

Planning to date has attempted to affect sense of place within the three layers with varying degrees of success. Generally, the more subjective the sense of place criteria, the more difficult to implement; landscape issues have been tackled much more readily than those of authenticity, for example. Within each of the discussions of Landscape, Community and Authenticity here, examples of their incorporation (and potential incorporation) into planning are presented and examined.

PLANNING RIGHTS AND ROLES

Preserving sense of place is more than just a process, it is a debate over private rights versus the public good. Small towns often must determine where to draw the line between infringing on the private property rights of landowners for the sake of the public good. Legal rights in this century have progressively shifted to favor the public good, giving towns and planners more power to regulate private lands. Chapter 5 examines this trend and projects where it may lead for planning for sense of place. Aesthetics for aesthetics' sake is now acceptable. Will the protection of community follow? And authenticity? If so, how can it be done?

As the legal rights of planners have evolved, the role of the planner has changed as well. The planner of twenty to thirty years ago was considered to be the professional with the power and the expertise to make decisions for the public. With the escalation of development conflicts and scrutiny of the public realm, the planner gradually became more of a guide. The planner's role was to guide residents through procedural channels

in order to reach their goals. In recent years, the planner has been swinging back once again to be an expert -- but still the listener. The planner now is often a consultant who must objectively bring the best of planning processes to the table, in order to aid and guide towns and cities. Discussion of this transformation is addressed in the Appendix.

LEELANAU TOWNSHIP, MICHIGAN

Threaded throughout this discussion of sense of place is the case study of a small town, as a touchstone for reflection. Often, towns that are written up in planning journals are extremes, either failures or successes. What about a small town which has not asked to be saved, and which is surviving rather well on its own? How do all of these ideals of sense of place -- landscape, community and authenticity -- apply here?

The small town is Leelanau Township, Michigan. I approached officials and planning commission members on village, township and county levels through individual interviews and, later, a group meeting. I was able to ask these local planners their opinions, both as residents and as planners, on sense of place issues. Meetings were purposely nonbinding and conversational, and I was able to begin to uncover how these ideals are or would be perceived and used in an actual town setting.

Leelanau (pronounced Lee-la-naw) Township is the farthest town north on Leelanau Peninsula, the 'little finger' of Michigan's lower peninsula stretching up between Lake Michigan and Grand Traverse Bay. The Peninsula, which constitutes Leelanau County (Leelanau, meaning in jumbled Indian lore, "Land of Delight"), is a quiet, naturally spectacular area for which residents feel a very strong affinity. The area as a whole is decidedly rustic; there is one traffic light in the whole county and there are no chain restaurants or chain hotels. A significant undertaking this past year was to rename roads in order to institute a 911 emergency system. As Kathleen Stocking describes in her book of Leelanau people and places:

Leelanau Peninsula [is] a county of rolling hills, cherry orchards, dunes, and ninety miles of Lake Michigan shoreline -- with an indigenous Indian population, several generations of Polish, French and Norwegian immigrants, about twenty years' worth of hippies, and several thousand tourists. Except for the tourists, we are an isolated, unsophisticated population.³

³ Stocking, Kathleen. *Letters from the Leelanau: Essays of People and Place*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990, p. 48.

Although a bit colloquial, this description touches upon important aspects of Leelanau County: the topography, the isolation, the eclectic mix of people, and the unsophistication (a term not implying ignorance, but rather a conscious decision of valuing quality of life over materialism). As a resident explained to native writer Kathleen Stocking, "You have to have a very decided philosophy of life to make it up here... A view of the bay and half the pay and all that."⁴ A pervasive sense throughout the peninsula is that people *want* to live there, and have made sacrifices or adjustments to be able to do so.

The tourist presence is strong in the summertime; Leelanau has long been a tourist haven for those 'in the know.' Being a peninsula, Leelanau does not get 'through traffic' – people do not pass through on their way to somewhere else, or if they do, they have purposely taken the scenic route. One has to make a conscious decision to enter the County. Over the years, however, Leelanau County has been discovered, and throughout the peninsula there is concern over the growing number of summer vacationers mobbing the area every year. Residents grumble over the loss of character as their towns begin to swarm with tourists each Memorial Day.

In Leelanau Township, most residents do not term themselves 'from Leelanau,' but instead hail from either Northport or Omena, the township's two villages. Northport, the largest village with a population of about 600, is a smaller analogy of Leelanau Peninsula. One must make a conscious decision to go an extra mile off the beaten path (highway M-22) to visit the village center. Then, once inside the village, people must eventually turn around and go back out the way they came. (A planning official offered this as the explanation why Northport has remained low-key while other villages in the peninsula have been gentrified: Northport is not high-profile, high-traffic enough.) As the peninsula as a whole is becoming less isolated, the analogous question hangs in the air as to whether Northport finally will become so too. Planning officials agree that although Northport may be uniquely situated, it is only a matter of time before this growth catches up with them.

How, then, can growth be managed to least disrupt Northport and Leelanau residents' way of life? The question cannot be answered soon enough, as the village and township have been facing their greatest challenge to date. A large-scale resort development has been proposed for an uninhabited island (North Fox Island) 18 miles off-shore. The island falls under Leelanau jurisdiction, and Mark Conner, the developer, proposes to run ferry service for the development out of Northport. The island would

⁴ Ibid., p. 27.

supply 642 vacation housing units (as proposed), twice the number of households in Northport village alone. Conner's proposal also includes a golf course, airstrip, two marinas, a town center and many other amenities, all on an island which is less than 1.5 square miles in area.

Ideas about growth on the island and on the mainland will be used here as points of discussion for testing out sense of place ideals. By reflecting the issues of landscape, community and authenticity through this Leelanau looking glass, we can gain a better understanding of how practical and feasible these ideals are in an actual town, not just in theory.

In summary, with the perspectives of theory, implementation and reality, we can determine where small town planning may be and should be heading. What processes can Leelanau, and other small towns, aim for? I will argue that an underlying distinction is to look for *processes* rather than direct answers. This single change in mindset could encourage the individuality and innovation needed to help each unique small town remain unique. With this basis, the choice of specific processes to use can be a factor of which layers of sense of place -- Landscape, Community or Authenticity -- a town wishes to pursue.

CHAPTER 2

LANDSCAPE

Sense of place begins with the tangible parts of a place: the built and the natural environment. The unique combination of a small town's built and natural spaces creates the basis for why people feel an emotional attachment to the town. Certain sights within a town evoke memories or reflect the personalities of the people. Certain buildings house businesses, families and histories. Certain views are distinctive and may symbolize a place or region. The many parts feed into a larger image, a sense of place, and each one of the parts serves a purpose:

The experience [of landscape] can be diminished if spectacular or essential or well-liked components are taken away; it can be weakened or contaminated, or even poisoned, by the addition of inappropriate elements; it can get out of balance if some of the signals are very strong or raucous, because people will then have a hard time broadening the sweep of their attention to bring all of what they are experiencing into conscious focus.¹

The landscape is the physical realm which serves as a framework for townspeople to fill in with experiences, connections and meanings. If the framework slowly disappears or becomes muddled, its strength of sense of place is weakened.

The built environment, specifically the *Townscape* (a term created by Ian Nairn in *The American Landscape*), is the constructed realm. Streets, buildings, landscaping, cars, people and many other parts contribute to this realm. Increasingly, planning regulations are requiring minimum standards for good design, cohesiveness and relationship of many of these elements. The natural environment, or the *Countryside*, has been a more elusive medium. The natural landscape has fewer boundaries, has less activity and is more widespread. Because of the magnitude of the resources to be protected, guidelines are difficult to pinpoint and to institute. However, as countryside has rapidly become a scarce resource, the problem has become threatening enough for planners to take action. Growth is beginning to be coerced into leaving room for the countryside.

The balance of townscape and countryside within a whole region has also been the focus of growing attention. Towns are reaching across borders to find how to preserve

¹ Hiss, Tony. *The Experience of Place*. New York: Vintage Books/Random House, Inc., 1990, p. 82.

their countryside and improve their townscapes. This connection of many townscapes and countrysides irrespective of their political boundaries has evolved into the field of regional planning. Regional planning recognizes the advantages of working collectively rather than individually, as more in-depth study can be done with relatively fewer resources and with better perspective. Towns also can benefit from a broader view of their identity, and the reverberations of their actions, in a larger context.

Together, these three -- townscape, countryside and regional balance -- define the scales of the first level of approach to protecting and incubating sense of place. They are the framework of the physical world, where character, livability and quality of life begin.

TOWNSCAPE: THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

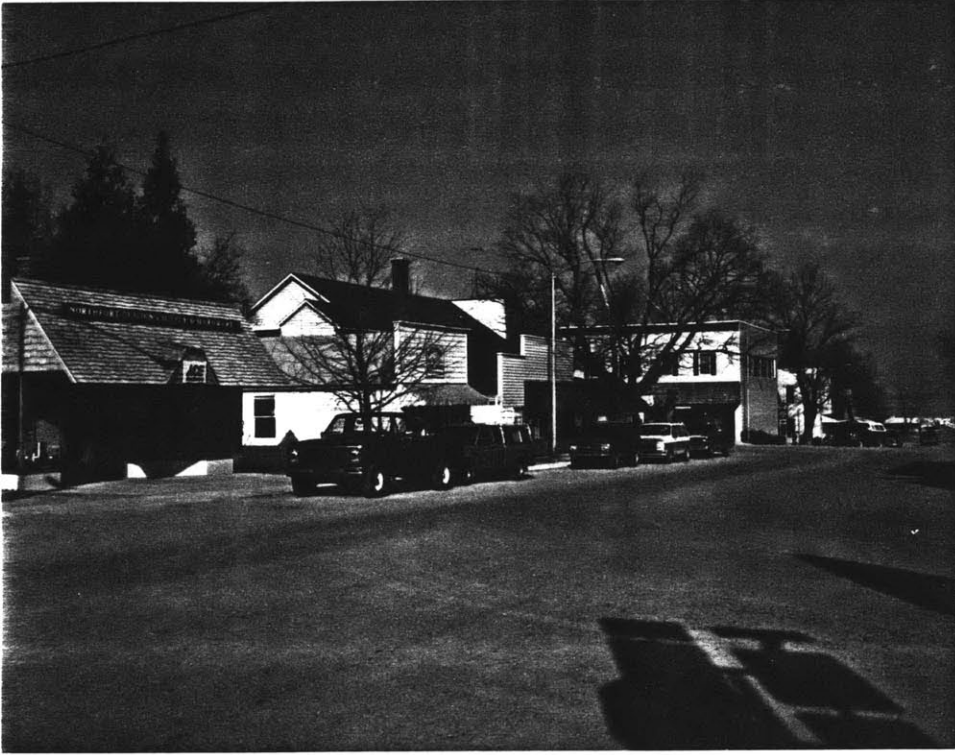
Planners, in a traditional definition, deal most readily with zoning and uses. However, in the past 40 years planners have begun to direct the realm of design to gain potential benefits as well.

Most towns eventually realize that zoning by itself is unable to ensure that new development is integrated sensitively into their community. Zoning, which regulates land-use location and density, does not address the visually important design issues which have such a significant impact upon our townscapes. Exerting some positive influence over the design of new development is often essential if a town's traditional image is to be protected and reinforced.²

Thus, the planner's toolbox has expanded, as well as his/her influence and responsibility. Orchestrating design is a first step in managing a town's image.

A townscape consists, on one level, of many *individual elements*. If a town is an extension of a person's home, town design is comparable to choosing home furnishings that are cohesive yet comfortable, affordable yet presentable. In a townscape, this implies attention to the individual elements of signage, historic elements, fenestration (window and door treatments), building materials, landscaping and so forth. These elements are individual, distinct and concrete, and can be specifically referenced. Cities and towns have learned that unless they specifically ask developers for certain effects, they won't get them; by being able to pinpoint these elements easily, towns have the best chances for getting positive results.

² Yaro, Robert D., Randall G. Arendt, Harry L. Dodson and Elizabeth A. Brabec. *Dealing with Change in the Connecticut River Valley: A Design Manual for Conservation and Development*. Cambridge: Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 1988, p. 127.



Townscape: Looking east down Nagonaba Street in Northport



Townscape: Looking west up Nagonaba Street in Northport



Townscape: The core of Omena village. Left, Omena Post Office; Right, Omena Bay Country Store. Omena has a cohesive, albeit limited, architecture style which could benefit from historic preservation status.

Design regulations and signage regulations are two of the most recent, commonly used tools to promote landscape quality. Leelanau township has instituted signage regulations; Northport is drafting design guidelines for the village proper. Leelanau's signage regulations have been amended to their zoning ordinance and therefore are more regulatory, while Northport is choosing to use theirs more as an advisory tool or an information source. This allows them more flexibility and subjectivity in their goals and ideals. These represent two approaches to guiding design.

Within Northport's efforts, one of the challenges of guiding design quickly arose: in the village, there is no coherent, pervasive design style. The mix of architecture in the village is so varied that the best term that the design consultant could come up with to encompass the theme was "eclectic vernacular, with a strong frontier flavor,"³ which can equate somewhat to the idea of a 'patchwork quilt.' The draft Guidelines recognize traits such as false second-story facades, cornices, indigenous materials and fenestration. However, it is difficult to manage such a collection of architecture styles when buildings

³ Progressive Architecture/Engineering/Planning. *Village of Northport Architectural Design Standards (Draft)*, July 17, 1991, p. 2.

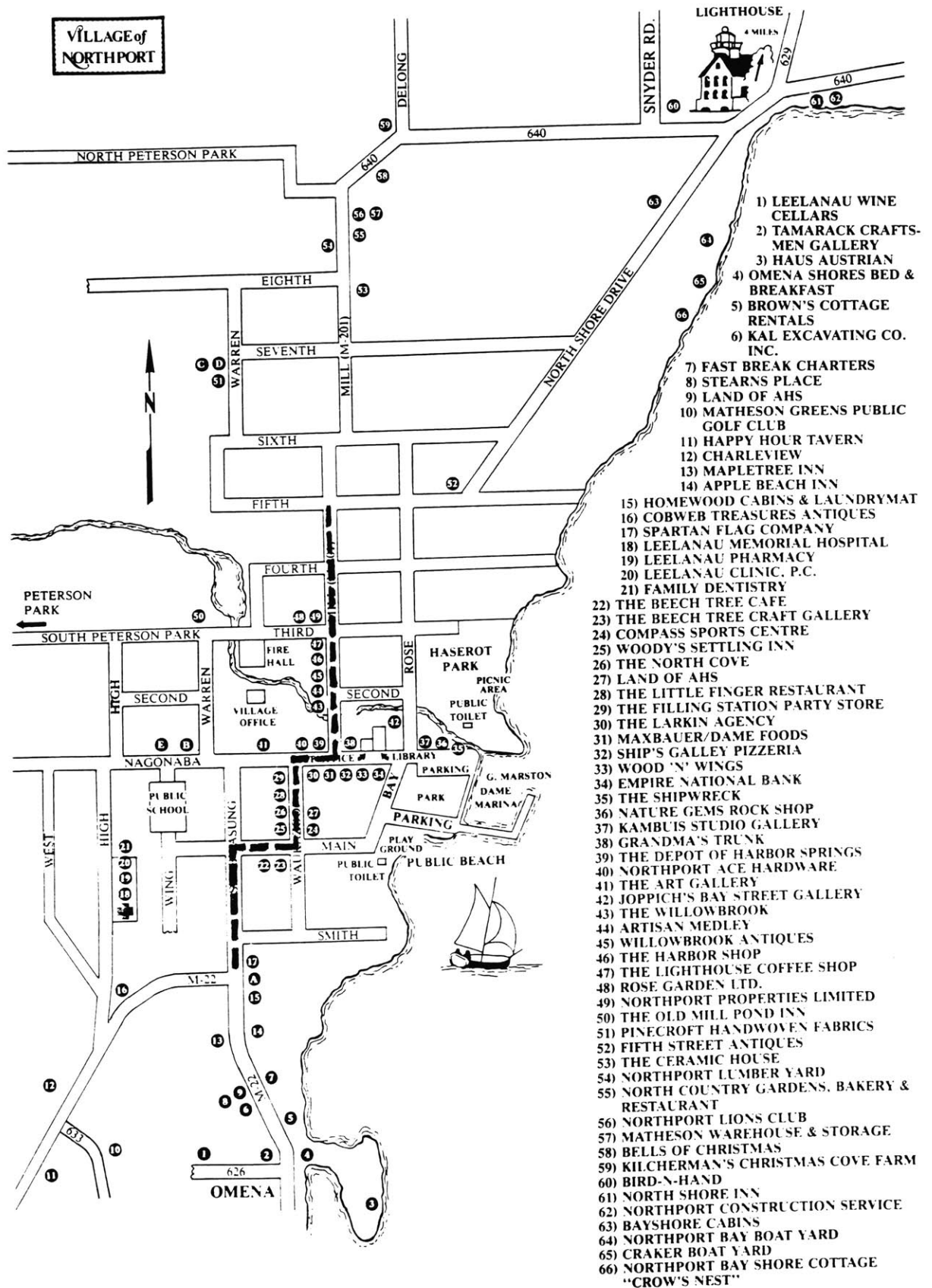
are so dissimilar, and where many are distinctly *unhistorical* and unadorned in nature. Specific guidelines are difficult to institute when a patchwork nature of a town represents so much of its character.

A patchwork nature is often common, and dealing with it approaches a second level of design. Beyond the individual elements is how they relate to one another. Collectively, elements relate to the townscape as a whole and to the townspeople. This includes ideas of density, configuration, order, contrast, coherence, legibility and so forth, many of which were referenced or created in Kevin Lynch's studies of cities. The crossing of roads, the presence of businesses, architectural styles or workings, the conglomeration of certain types of people; single elements tie together to create larger effects, which Lynch termed such things as Paths, Nodes, Districts, Edges and Landmarks. These help to define a city, or in this case, a small town. For example, Northport's 'Main Street' is actually comprised of three streets, Waukazoo, Nagonaba and Mill Streets, linked in a jagged path threading through town (see next page). Another example is that certain 'everyday' businesses, such as the grocery store, the post office and the bank, happen to be grouped together, creating a node of uses on the eastern end of Nagonaba Street. And for one planning commission member, rounding a certain curve on highway M-22 brings Omena Bay into full view, a landmark which tells her that she is almost home to Northport. These all carry a higher meaning than just the sum of their individual elements.

Since these effects are usually caused by combinations of separate players, it seems that a higher order should prevail, such as planning, to recognize the collective good. Yet, since connections are often uniquely site-specific, they are difficult for planners to regulate with a single tool. As a result, planners, especially in small towns, often choose to avoid the issue altogether.

One of the best ways to regulate this connectedness *and* accommodate the issue of site-specific goals is by creating design review panels. The task of a design review panel is not to 'grade' a building *per se*, but to examine its relation to its surroundings. Such a panel would likely be a luxury for most small towns, since smaller towns often do not have sufficient financial or professional resources to take on such a task (nor do they have enough projects to make the process worthwhile). As a result, the effect of individual changes on the whole townscape is often a lost issue.

Design guidelines can only hope to fill part of the gap. Perhaps local architects and designers may be willing to serve as consultants for the community. Or, the role of design consultants may be passed onto a higher level, perhaps to a county or regional level. With greater resources and a greater critical mass of projects, a design review



Northport's 'Main Street' zig-zags through the village, connecting five different streets. It creates a confusing path for people who are not familiar with the area, especially drivers: those traveling this 'Main Street' route have the right of way at all times, at all corners, and never are supposed to stop.

board may prove feasible at this level. Future trends may encourage such a cooperative effort.

One other way in which mingled design effects can be controlled is if the 'higher order' is in the hands of a single designer, starting from scratch. This is the case with architects designing 'new towns'. Interestingly, cutting-edge designers of the 1990's are creating replicas of old-style, unstructured, uncontrolled, vernacular *small town* environments. Duany/Plater-Zyberk, the team which designed influential Seaside, Florida, spurns suburbia in favor of small town density, charm and activity.⁴ They have chosen to formalize and recreate what vernacular small towns have taken centuries to produce. They emulate built environments with recognizable purposes and connections, those with a sense of place. These new types of projects and design give a renewed appreciation for the appeal of small towns' built environments.

COUNTRYSIDE: THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Beyond the townscape, beyond the town limits, lies the foundation of rural landscapes: the countryside. Open fields, untouched woodlands, natural resources, farm homesteads and other ingredients melt together into a pleasing balance of nature and man. In the past couple of decades, the newest planning has paid particular attention to balance in the landscape, regardless of whether lands are publicly or privately owned. The approach is a combination of rural planning and landscape architecture, or "Rural Landscape Planning." In this approach, landscape architects have pioneered ways of determining visual quality in landscapes, and from their results, planners have been able to take more concrete steps toward protection and enhancement of these qualities.⁵

One such landscape trait is open space. Both cultivated and uncultivated, open space represents a strong symbol of rurality. Poorly sited homes or buildings can be highly detrimental to the purity of open space and their effects are not easily remedied. The balance of the natural and built environment is delicate; the potential insensitivity leads to strong concern for open space conservation. One environmental protectionist asserts that the first 5% of development does 50% of the damage to people's perceptions of open space. The second 5% does the remaining 50%.⁶ It does not take much to

⁴ Knack, Ruth Eckdish. "Repent, Ye Sinners, Repent," *Planning*, August 1989.

⁵ Yaro, et al., op cit., p. 11.

⁶ Hiss, op cit., p. 167.



Poorly sited homes can be detrimental to the landscape; still, residents feel that private property rights should be upheld

poison a site or a view; even if the majority of landowners do not 'sell out,' only a handful have to "fall from grace to spoil things for others."⁷

Small towns, particularly in the Midwest, are firmly tied to their open space in the form of their fields. Once fields and farmsteads are given up to development, losses associated with land turnover go beyond farming production to the visual identity once created by it. This identity is based on how the "agricultural landscape and buildings emanate a strong aura of the rural aesthetic -- 'a sense of roots'."⁸ Cultivated fields provide local people with a symbol of a tangible and understandable livelihood. They represent the fragile equilibrium between the use of, and respect for, the land. With inappropriate development, this aura is quickly lost.

In Leelanau township, and throughout the county, farmland is indeed a central core of open space. Many fields are planted with orchards, and the main crop is cherries. (As a local T-shirt boasts, Leelanau County is "Cherry Republic," sporting "Life, Liberty, Beaches and Pie.") A significant number of new trees were planted in the 1970's to meet increasing demand, but then cherry prices dropped in the 1980's. Pressures have increased to sell off land to higher land value uses, particularly housing and recreation.⁹

⁷ Ibid., p. 122.

⁸ Yaro, et al., op cit., p. 8.

⁹ Leelanau Township Planning Commission. *Leelanau Township Master Plan*, adopted May 9, 1990, Plan

increased to sell off land to higher land value uses, particularly housing and recreation.⁹ Questions have arisen as to whether prime farmland should be sold off for uses other than farming. Many residents would like to see the farmland kept intact, but at the same time, planning commission members (and likely others in the community) feel hesitant in restricting farmers' land rights and values. Many farm owners count upon the market value of their land for their retirement. Two planning commission members themselves are reportedly in the process of selling off parts of their orchards to the highest bidders, the residential land buyers. And the land is selling briskly. Inefficient farmland is a difficult issue to settle.

In cases such as farmlands, advocating for open space and/or protecting farmland means questioning traditional zoning principles and property rights. (This debate is taken up in detail in Chapter 5.) Innovative, flexible tactics of the past decade have begun to ensure the protection of the landscape as well as to try to compensate for private owners' land values. Examples include transfer of development rights (TDR's) where the right to build is transferred to another piece of property, or flexible zoning, where development in one parcel is managed so as to concentrate its effects in fewer areas. Another avenue is the outright purchasing of conservation easements, to buy out the property rights of others in order to maintain the land as open space. In farming areas, governments have gone so far as to purchase farmland and then lease it back to the farmers, guaranteeing their 'right' to farm the land and to not be forced out by high pressure land markets.

In Leelanau township, flexible zoning techniques have been instituted in the form of Planned Unit Development (PUD) regulations. Unfortunately, the town's hands are tied on instituting Transfer of Development Right (TDR) regulations because of state legislation. Michigan state law mandates that development rights cannot be transferred between non-contiguous properties. Higher jurisdiction in this case proves to be a roadblock in furthering land use regulations.

Along with innovation in landscape protection, there must be flexibility and as much foresight as possible. One of the first tools created to protect open space, minimum lot size zoning, actually ends up working contrary to original goals. This "well-intentioned but misguided" theory requires that homes each build on a minimum 1-, 2- or 10-acre lot, theoretically to ensure the rural, low density character of the landscape. However, in this way development is spread out and is potentially even more detrimental. Providing infrastructure is more expensive and less efficient; land is cut up into chunks

⁹ Leelanau Township Planning Commission. *Leelanau Township Master Plan*, adopted May 9, 1990, Plan Basis section, pp. 10-11.

rather than being saved on the whole.¹⁰ The rural character gets nibbled away in individual and collective waste, especially in the fastest-growing communities.

In instances such as minimum-acre zoning, small towns (like most other places) do not have an immediate concept of what their planning will do to their landscape. In the past few years, planning consultants have turned to 'shock treatment', or the creation of complete build-out scenarios to show a town exactly what their zoning is on course to produce. Leelanau County was 'shocked' into the recognition that, without intervention, their present zoning would bring them to a future population of 300,000.¹¹ (Presently, the county stands at approximately 18,000 residents.) An even more convincing tool would have been visual renderings of what these numbers would mean, particularly in short term increments, beginning immediately.

Visual tools, including simulated photographs, models and sketches, can be highly effective for understanding future scenarios. They have the ability to show the built environment as well as the toll upon the natural environment. Many Leelanau residents or tourists enjoy spending an afternoon going for a drive, taking in the scenery, and never realize that the scenery is in jeopardy, site by site. Visual examples can spur immediate recognition, and people often react more strongly than to mere statistics. Residents can plainly see that view sheds suffer; that open spaces become stopped up and cluttered; and that roads, neighborhoods and towns can lose their relation to bodies of water, fields, hills and mountains. Leelanau Peninsula, with its ninety miles of shoreline, has tremendous views which are, or could eventually be, in jeopardy. Great contrasts in the built and natural environment, which often create the breathtaking beauty of landscape, could someday be filled in and lost. Often, sensitive visual ties such as these can only truly be captured by visual tools.

The *Connecticut River Valley Design Manual* constituted a breakthrough for planning by employing visual means to explain planning ideals. The ideals themselves had been circulating within planning circles for some time, but the Manual innovated simple, visual scenario comparisons. Produced in 1986, the *Design Manual* is now considered a "bible" for rural planning, in the words of one Leelanau planning official. Drawings show quickly and convincingly that clustered development saves open space and rural character (not two-acre zoning); that village environments are more cost-effective and least detrimental to open space; and that hiding development or working with its

¹⁰ Yaro, et al., op cit., p. 13.

¹¹ Anderson, Niebuhr & Associates, Inc. *The Leelanau General Plan: A Survey of Citizens Concerning Issues Relating to Long-Range Planning in Leelanau County (Working Paper #2)*, June 25, 1990, p. 27.

surroundings mitigates its effects. By regaling the benefits of managed growth, and portraying them visually, the Manual has been convincing and effective.

In the same vein, a commission representing all of Grand Traverse Bay, including Leelanau County, has begun a similar effort for this region. By summer of this year, the final draft should be complete, providing a personalized, accessible presentation of the issues facing the Grand Traverse area. As a result, residents will be better able to raise these issues for attention and debate in each of their communities.

Factors affecting sense of place, such as these of the countryside, can be legitimized by being identified, agreed upon, and then specifically protected. Whether shown by numeric or visual tools analyses, the most important goal should be to make the risks of simply 'standing still' immediately clear. Growth in itself is not bad; growth under poor or non-existent guidance is the danger.

COOPERATION ACROSS JURISDICTIONS

Both Connecticut River Valley and Grand Traverse Bay efforts reflect a relatively new approach: a regionalist view. In the past, some towns tried to find answers to planning questions by looking beyond their own borders to gain expertise and second-hand experience from similar communities. Unfortunately, this often took considerable money, time and resources. If solutions were not searched for, or found, efforts were often repeated needlessly. Also, individual towns regulate with their own concerns in mind, which is often inefficient for an entire region. An intergovernmental approach appeared to be an attractive, efficient solution.

The regionalist approach to planning is usually as an advisory role, as towns do not like to surrender their power to a higher, more general authority. However, regional planners can provide a unique, nonpolitical view for towns searching for perspective and advice. Regional planners are in a better position to access information from a wide range of communities, and have the time to research issues given that their results will be widely distributed.

Regional planners promote cooperation and consistency across a region. Importantly, they can promote collective town agreements, where otherwise, towns individually would not choose to 'play the bad guys' to regulate their constituents while an abutting town does not. Regional plans often assert that on a larger scale

environmental design planning can be a mechanism for building private equity and public value simultaneously.¹²

Regional planners are often proponents of the idea that growth can be expected and planned for, and no longer needs to be considered the enemy. Growth need only be guided, such that “that which gets added to a place is less important than what you can stay close to.”¹³ In essence, the balance of the built and natural environments is just as important as each individually.

Soon, Leelanau and Northport will have the results of the Grand Traverse Bay regional commission to serve as an additional guide for their planning. Also in the works is a general growth plan at the county level. County planner Tim Dolehanty has led efforts to try to orchestrate a more collective, comprehensive planning effort for the 16 independent jurisdictions. Once the county plan is complete, each jurisdiction will have the discretion whether to adopt the recommendations of the plan.

So far, the county-level process has been thorough and has drawn much community participation; the results will likely be very helpful to each of the jurisdictions and therefore to the county as a whole. Leelanau County reflects a growing number of regions beginning to work together; the increasing trend toward regional plans reflects the worth of, and the potential for, acting collectively.

INTERACTION BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE LANDSCAPE

An interesting distinction underlying these discussions of the landscape, and the planning tools developed to protect it, is the idea of the *individual*. Discussions of the built and natural environment in planning concentrate, for the most part, upon how a setting affects an individual and vice versa. (As a point of comparison, in the next chapter on community, how a setting affects *the interaction between individuals* is the focus.)

The interaction between the individual and the environment has two avenues of causality. Either an individual affects the environment (where a person's perception affects what they see or experience), or the environment affects the individual (where a place shapes a person's behavior or identity). The two are closely related, but recognizing each of the viewpoints is important to determine two kinds of approaches for preserving sense of place.

¹² Hiss, op cit., p. 216 (quoting Robert Yaro).

¹³ Ibid., p. 200.

The Individual Shapes the Environment

An individual carries around 'baggage' of past experiences, expectations and values into an environment, and these color his/her perception of that place.¹⁴ In this way, the individual 'shapes' the environment. A person's perception is their own reality; therefore, each and every person holds a different view of 'reality' of a place. As an example, local residents have certain 'baggage,' such as memories of learning to swim in a pond down the road when they were young, or feeling that their town is the only place like it in the country, or respecting farmers for the hard work they do. Meanwhile, a tourist coming into town may think that the pond looks murky, that the town reminds them of a place back East, and that they can see why so many farmers just want to get out of the business. Essentially, "whether one blames or praises a particular spot often has as much to do with what one brings to it as it does with the attributes of the setting itself."¹⁵

Based on this importance of the individual, sense of place is the interaction between a setting (physical and social) and a person (with their particular psychological factors).¹⁶ Each person has their own unique view of a setting, as they mix in experiences, mood, emotion, memories, imagination, intentions and sensory perception to come out with an image of a place.¹⁷ Blain Brown (MIT '81) identifies 'legibility' (a term from Kevin Lynch) as one of the two most important contributors to sense of place. Legibility is a quality of a landscape which allows a person to recognize its parts and then organize them into a coherent pattern.¹⁸ It is, in other words, the ability of an individual to shape the environment.

Considering this viewpoint of the individual shaping his/her own experiences, how should this affect our pursuit of sense of place? Or, simply, how do we enhance, or educate and affect, the individual? Memories, meaning, history and other forms of knowledge serve to strengthen the bond between an individual and a setting. In this Information Age, tourists and locals alike enjoy hearing about the history or peculiarities of their town. First impressions such as town entrance signs, travel brochures, guide books or referrals carry much weight and can be refined by a town. Rituals and customs

¹⁴ Hough, Michael. *Out of Place: Restoring Identity to the Regional Landscape*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990, p. 69.

¹⁵ Steele, Fritz. *The Sense of Place*. Boston: CBI Publishing Co., Inc., 1981, p. 6.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁷ Relph, *op cit.*, p. 56.

¹⁸ Brown, Blain. *A Sense of Place*. Cambridge, MA: MIT M. Arch Thesis, 1981, p. 4.

increase the meaning of a place. All of these inputs can enhance an individual's mindset when experiencing a place, and therefore enhance his/her perception of that place.

The Environment Shapes the Individual

Shaping an individual with the environment is said to be the goal of behavioral psychologists and aspiring architects. Although their goals may be a bit extreme (or just overstated), there is good cause to recognize that environment can affect people's perceptions of themselves and of their experiences:

We all react, consciously and unconsciously, to the places where we live and work, in ways we scarcely notice or that are only now becoming known to us. Our ordinary surroundings, built and natural alike, have an immediate and continuing effect on the way we feel and act, and on our health and intelligence. These places have an impact on our sense of self, our sense of safety, the kind of work we get done, the ways we interact with other people, even our ability to function as citizens in a democracy. In short, the places where we spend our time affect the people we are and can become.¹⁹

In this way, each person is a reflection of an individual self and of his/her surroundings. Thus, identity based upon the landscape takes on great importance when protecting sense of a place for local residents. Many parts of the landscape are crucial for residents to identify with, to be able to feel that they 'still have roots' in an area, and to 'feel themselves' in.

As an example of environment shaping the individual, many residents have noted that Leelanau County's identity as a peninsula determines a great deal of the character of the people. As mentioned earlier, visitors must make a conscious decision to enter. Weather on the peninsula can differ dramatically from that south or east, putting Leelanau residents in what seems a completely different world. The area is surrounded on three sides by water, a constraint but at the same time a spectacular amenity.

We are, of course, somewhat isolated on the Leelanau Peninsula -- geographically and in other ways as well, which is not the same thing as living without cognizance of what's going on. Living on the Leelanau Peninsula is a little like staying back at home when there's a war going on: we hear what's happening at The Front, but we aren't *there*.²⁰

¹⁹ Hiss, *op cit.*, p. xi.

²⁰ Stocking, *op cit.*, p. xviii.

Leelanau Peninsula allows and encourages a certain escape and comforting isolation. The Peninsula is not just a shape on a map, it is a way of life; it accentuates and shapes the identities of residents.

Environment also has the ability to trigger feelings or memories. A building at a 'human scale', say, two to four stories rather than skyscraper height, makes people feel more comfortable and confident. View scapes can give "fleeting visual pleasure"²¹; landscapes can entertain, disgust, delight, or intrigue those who look upon them. Landscapes can also trigger memories, whether a person has seen an exact setting before or not. Once triggered, these preconceptions, feelings and memories in turn add to one's experience. This rounds out a circle of environment shaping the individual and then the individual shaping the environment. Spurring this cycle is often desirable; the more deeply the two are intertwined, the deeper then meanings, and therefore the richer the experience.

In both these causalities, shaping the environment can have strong effects on individuals. By recognizing our usually unconscious reactions, we can become more aware of our experiences and what triggers them. With these, we can then begin to add layers of meaning to landscapes. To affect design is to affect perception, and therefore the quality of one's experience; this is the goal behind paying attention to issues of townscape and countryside and of the landscape as a whole. The physical environment is a base for people's feelings and experiences. Recognizing and promoting the ties of individuals to landscapes can contribute a great deal to maintaining a sense of place.

²¹ Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1974, p. 247.

CHAPTER 3 COMMUNITY

If the last chapter concerned how individuals relate to an environment, this chapter concerns how a *group* of individuals, specifically a community, relates among itself and with its environment. Community reaches beyond the physical aspects to the society, the network of people, within -- the friends, neighbors, shopkeepers and acquaintances, as well as the meeting places, contacts and relationships.

Beyond the impression that a human scale has been preserved in the architecture, or that the cars haven't defeated the pedestrians in the battle for the streets, or that the pace of life suggests gentler and less complicated time, the picture doesn't reveal the dynamics needed to produce an engaging informal public life [or, community].¹

Beyond good landscape there still lie questions of good community. Small towns are renowned for having strong communities, but even here dynamics are changing and community is a resource which needs to be protected.

Designers, particularly in architecture but also planning, have long pondered the connection between the layout of a community and its social cohesiveness.² In the social and behavioral sciences, the idea of community is currently a popular issue. Researchers are trying to understand what is so deeply important about the meaningful human contact which small towns provide. Yet, despite the many disciplines presently approaching the subject, few have reached across disciplines, nor beyond theorizing, to address how to fix or create community in the real world.³

Planning has begun to mention the need to understand how community is generated and sustained. So far, benefits of community often are alluded to in design manuals and master plans, but they have yet to be addressed concretely in the 'how-to' sections. This is true even of the champion of open space and cluster development, the *Connecticut River Valley Design Manual*, as it succinctly states:

¹ Oldenburg, op cit., p. 14.

² Mackin, Anne and Alex Krieger. *A Design Manual for Cities and Towns*. Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities, Sept. 1989, p. 6.

³ Munsell, Kenneth D. "A Multidisciplinary Approach Is Needed to Understand Community," *Small Town*, Sept./Oct. 1991, p. 3.

Town character encompasses more than natural landforms and traditional buildings; it includes the town's social life as well. Whether people walk "downtown," congregate at the post office or the corner store, sit on benches along the street, or meet at Town Hall, all these social activities contribute to the composite character of any town. The town's buildings and their placement affect its social life, and therefore directly, and indirectly, affect town character.⁴

However, beyond the coincidental advice of concentrating development within the village core, the *Connecticut River Valley Manual* does not offer specific advice as to how to promote these proclaimed "social activities." *The Design Primer for Cities and Towns*, another recent design manual (produced for the National Endowment for the Arts), also advises small towns to strive for community. It explains that to reach the benefits of community, small towns should pay attention to characteristics such as architectural detailing, building scale, mix of uses and walking proximities. Each has the potential to lead to a more active community life. Yet the collective, interrelational activity of the people is still absent from discussion.⁵

Exploring the relationship between community and place involves many factors, including considering *people* as a resource (rather than just the landscape), preserving the dynamic of people's interaction and use patterns, and respecting the importance of social contacts and of 'community generators,' places which encourage interaction among community members. Connections among people are an essential aspect of sense of place, particularly in small towns. It is, then, important to determine how an environment supports or discourages this. Just as other scarce resources are analyzed, discussed and catalogued in order to be preserved, so too must these endangered resources of community.

PEOPLE AS A RESOURCE

A rural community's people can be one of, if not the most important asset of a place. In small towns, the people are a large part of what the landscape 'means,' and their value needs to be recognized. A place is familiar if one sees familiar faces, and this happens more often in small towns, by merit of probability. Just by going down to Main Street or the local grocery store, one can expect to run into people that he/she knows. Rural

⁴ Yaro, et al., op cit., p. 104.

⁵ As an explanation, both the *Connecticut River Valley Design Manual* and the *Design Primer* are under the constraints of their presentation medium. They are written to be used by a wide range of towns and cities; discussion of community can be difficult because it is often individualistic depending upon the place.

communities offer a realm where many different layers of relationships involve the same small number of people -- shopping, schools, churches, restaurants, and so forth -- creating more occasions for people to know one another and form deeper contacts.

There is also the strong resource when similar types of people are joined together. Families often dominate small town social scenes, when generations have lived in the area for centuries. Or, areas may nurture or lure certain types of people or occupations; these types of people collectively contribute to a town's character.

Each year many rural Americans move to town... Those who are leaving the countryside -- whether dairy farmers in Wisconsin or ranchers in Montana -- may be replaced by newcomers, but in the process much of what makes Wisconsin Wisconsin and Montana Montana is lost. Saving land, water, wildlife and historic buildings is indeed important, but if these resources are preserved while the existing population leaves, the success may be a hollow one. Conservationists should help make it possible for those who have traditionally lived in rural communities to continue to do so if they wish. ⁶

If groups of locals are 'thinned out' by economic conditions such as increased land prices or lack of jobs, a town's character and social structure can suffer.

'City people,' either new residents or second-home owners, often move into an area without the perceptions and values of the natives. They are often accustomed to higher-price property markets, and are able and willing to pay higher prices, effectively pricing out the locals. Gentrification of the rural landscape ensues. Social and community connections may suffer.

As an example, in farming regions, increased land prices give farmers less and less incentive to farm, or may force them out altogether. By losing farmers, distinctive effects of people can be lost. For every five farmers who go out of business, it is estimated that one Main Street business closes and three to five workers in the community lose their job.⁷ Besides the economic losses, however, a community can also lose its visual ties to landscape and to agriculture. A soothing view of rolling farm land may be built over, or a local farmer who once sold vegetables at his roadside stand will be lost, or the coming of warmer weather will no longer be signified each year by a farmer's early field plowing.

⁶ Stokes, Samuel N., Elizabeth Watson, Genevieve P. Keller and J. Timothy Keller. *Saving America's Countryside: A Guide to Rural Conservation*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989, p. 18.

⁷ Canine, Craig. "A Tale of Two Farm Towns," *Utne Reader*, Sept./Oct. 1991 (excerpted from *Harrowsmith Country Life*, May/June 1991), p. 92.

Protecting the landscape, then, can mean protecting the people and the jobs for these people who reside within the landscape. Many states have integrated programs to purchase farming easements where the farmland is productive, but not productive enough to outbid a sharply increasing land market due to outside forces and interests. These programs give the farmland values the protection they need. Other communities have committed themselves to providing moderate income housing so that younger generations, farmers or otherwise, can afford to stay in the area.

This has been a significant concern on the part of Leelanau residents: increasingly, younger generations can not afford to live there. In Leelanau township and Northport, there has been an increasing concern over the lack of industries and other businesses (besides tourism).⁸ The lack of skilled, higher paying jobs leaves the locals no choice but to look for employment elsewhere. The children of long time residents cannot afford the increased housing prices and cannot find local jobs. In response, the township and the village have maintained or created zones for industrial development and are considering how these can be further encouraged.

Some communities have chosen to pursue growth not through industry but through the 'clean industry,' tourism. Tourism as an industry is a mixed blessing, as Leelanau County well knows. With its seasonal basis, it is undependable and can bring in an overload of outsiders. Locals must deal with increased hassles during the summer, often effectively losing their town for three months of the year. An influx of second home buyers often raises living costs for all residents; locals who have lived in the area all their lives now find themselves priced out of living on the waterfront or in other desirable areas. Tourism jobs recruit, for the most part, unskilled workers at lower wages and the jobs often do not offer worker benefits (thus adding another steep cost onto the local worker). The decrease in salaries are matched with increases in costs of living.

Steps can be taken to help locals gain more from tourism. A town can incur a local hotel and meal tax to fund worker benefits. It can promote local ownership (keeping the chains out so that profits remain in the area), or require that tourism developers buy a percentage of their goods and supplies from local businesses (produce, flowers, linen services, professional services, etc.). In this way, new growth can spur local economies.⁹ These steps are just a few examples of how communities can begin to take action so that the tourists are not the only ones reaping the benefits of an area's tourism.

⁸ Anderson, Niebuhr & Associates (The Leelanau General Plan), op cit., p. 27.

⁹ Tibbets, John. "Residents Can Profit From More Tourism," *Utne Reader*, July/Aug. 1991 (excerpted from the South Carolina Sea Grant Consortium newsletter *Coastal Heritage*, Summer 1991), p. 96.

"SACRED STRUCTURE" AND DYNAMICS

In some encouraging planning cases, carefully working with and conservatively benefiting from tourism or other growth has been the focus in design. Special attention is paid to a town's dynamic, or how people use their town, so that this usefulness will not be crowded out by new growth. In one well-documented case a town specifically mapped the places essential to their community dynamic. From this, they then moved forward to preserve and promote the interactions of the people with the architecture, the landscape and each other. This plan was done for Manteo, North Carolina, a small seacoast town, by landscape architect Randy Hester.

Hester argues that landscape architects have the most to offer communities: the skills to identify, catalog and protect the cultural heritage and life patterns, to give form to community goals, and to "inspire place-appropriate design choices."¹⁰ His process in Manteo involved and interrelated all of these skills. First, people brainstormed which places were most important to them, due to memories or uses or feelings. (In previous chapter terms, these were the places connected to the individual.) Second, Hester asked the residents to identify places important to their sense of community. These were the social places, the sentimental favorite spots, the important meeting junctures. The final collection of places, later termed the "Sacred Structure," consisted of places not necessarily historic nor aesthetically beautiful, but simply those crucial to the town's identity and its workings.

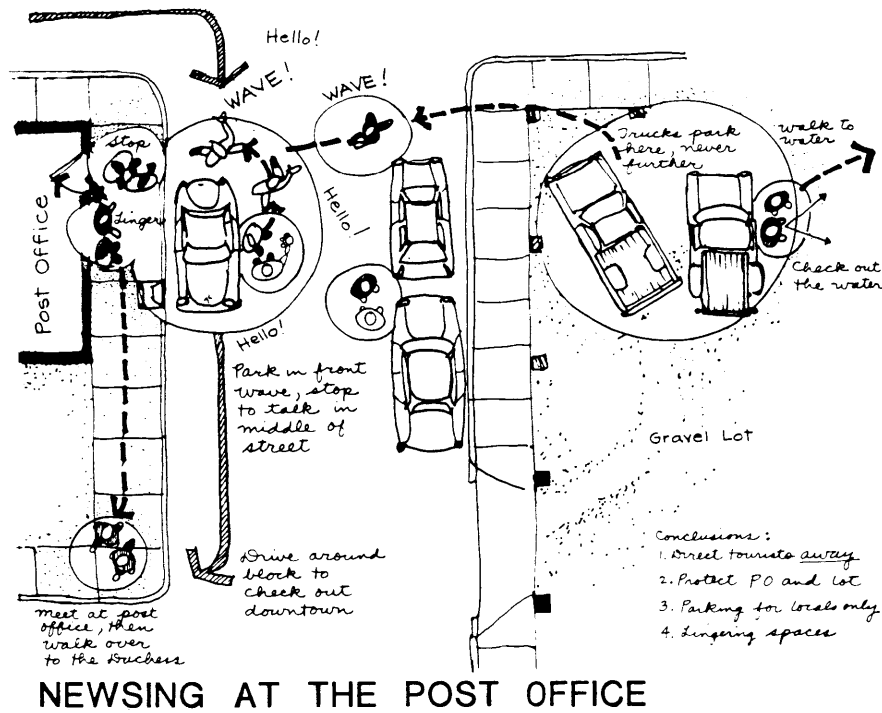
Many participants were pleasantly surprised that they shared the views of their neighbors. Individual meanings, when collected, were often found to be communally-held values. With a consensus of meanings, Manteo would be able to justify protecting these places with carefully designed regulations. Consensus was their strength.

Before drawing up these regulations, Randy Hester was also interested in seeing specifically how the town was used and how people interacted. The people valued their small town feel, and as the planner he felt that this awareness of the interaction patterns was a key to the survival of this feel. So, beyond just mapping the "Sacred Structure," he mapped interaction patterns to create a 'user profile.' This type of study uncovered nuances which might otherwise have been overlooked.

Based upon the Sacred Structure and on the user profiles, a Development Guide was eventually constructed. Growth was to be carefully directed, among and around the

¹⁰ Hester, Randolph T. Jr. "Landstyles and Lifescapes: 12 Steps to Community Development," *Landscape Architecture*: vol. 75, No. 1 (Jan./Feb. 1985), p. 78.

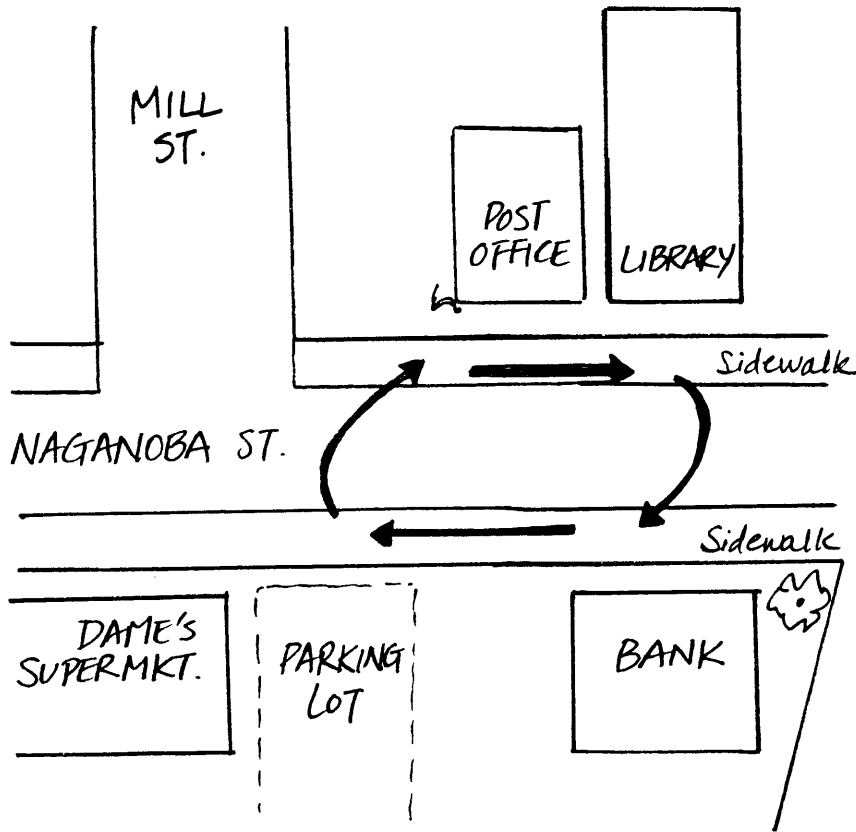
Sacred Structure but in no way harming it. Design and growth would necessarily be small-scale and piecemeal to accommodate this need. From the user profile, interactions of the residents were protected by consciously steering the tourists away from certain areas: a dirt parking lot, for example, was left untouched simply because it was a common spot for locals to stop, chat with neighbors, and look out over the water. By saving key places and interactions, this community was able to balance its inner workings with the growth and benefits of tourism.



A Hester analysis of community dynamics at the post office

Northport features many good examples of how special places may not be traditionally nor formally extraordinary. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, Northport's village architecture is eclectic. While smaller shops and restaurants have an architectural flavor, nearly all of the 'main' uses do not have a distinctive architectural style. These 'main' uses include the Township Hall and the Library, the bank, school, hospital, municipal marina building and the grocery store. All have modern, relatively unadorned 1970's brick facades. Village offices are of new construction. The Post Office does have a traditional look to it, but in reality it leases its building and has only been in that space for the past couple of decades or so. In sum, the workings of the people,

purposes and organizations have continued on strongly irrespective of the physical structures. The uses have proven more important than the buildings. This is a striking testimonial to the strong ties of the people within the town and the village, rather than the buildings themselves.



Dynamics of the east end of Nagonaba Street, where the 'hub' of everyday businesses are. People often meet one another by chance within this loop.

When planning officials were asked to pick significant places within the township and village, a listing of core businesses and uses were named. However, it was not until after the meeting when I spoke to the zoning administrator and her husband about a few of the town traditions that other meanings arose. One tradition is that on a certain day each spring, the Mill Pond is stocked with fish. Over a hundred children and their parents show up to fish (often with the parents contributing more to the fishing than the children) on this annual event. Another tradition is that of decorating the pine tree at the intersection of Waukazoo Street and Nagonaba Street every Christmas; come Christmas Eve, Santa Claus even arrives. The Mill Pond and the Christmas tree are spots which were not necessarily mentioned during the meeting by the planners; spots



The Mill Pond

like these are not as likely to spring to one's mind when initially thinking about spaces to protect. But their loss would be deeply felt and thus it is important to capture their meaning.

One of Hester's main aims is to let "archetypes and idiosyncrasies" inspire form.¹¹ By recognizing a town's unique features, no matter what they look like but so long as they are important to the residents, a planner will be better equipped to help the community survive growth pressures. With creativity, the sacred spots can be protected so that these sources of identity will not be lost, but in fact may even be enhanced.

SOCIAL CONTACTS

The *Connecticut River Valley Design Manual* does not address specific steps of how to spur community. It misses a great opportunity to discuss improving the lives of new home and neighborhood dwellers *beyond* just providing a nice view out of their picture window across the great open fields. Closer development due to cluster zoning can often spur community by encouraging 'neighborliness,' or social contacts.

Informal social contacts are often a large part of our lives and identity, and some sociologists point to their lack in less dense neighborhoods as an unsettling social

¹¹ Ibid., p. 83.

problem. Ray Oldenburg, one such sociologist, bemoans this as a 'fact' of our suburbanized existence. By living in suburbs and not smaller, comprehensive villages, we lose our sense of micro-community. We must shop at the same megamalls and megagrocery stores as those people from the next two or three towns over. Residential areas are separated from the town center, and often the town center itself has been broken apart and scattered. If this happens, we have no core of identity, of informal public life.¹²

These informal social contacts are strong forces which can help us feel welcome in our neighborhood and in our town. However, new neighborhoods do their best to ensure privacy. A European visitor to the United States found that "People here are proud to live in a 'good' area, but... these so-called desirable areas are like prisons. There is no contact between the various households, we rarely see the neighbors and certainly do not know any of them." This is the curse of the suburbs.¹³ Small towns are on a traditionally smaller, personalized scale, where people know and interact with their neighbors. Yet, even here, this characteristic is slowly slipping away. Rural residential neighborhoods are becoming more like those of the suburbs, especially as small town centers are dying out or becoming less of a point of reference due to the competing vitality of larger cities.

The less social, suburban trend can also be something carried to small towns by people who used to live in the suburbs and are entrenched in their ideas of privacy. They are the generation which has not learned the value of a rich community life.¹⁴ Native residents are often justified in arguing that "people from other places, especially cities, bring their way of life with them and change the openness and friendly character of a town."¹⁵ A small town can be a naturally good assimilator of people, but only if the newer people are willing to make an effort. Social contacts, once standard in small towns, often are becoming only a luxury. Overall changes in lifestyles and ideals are often the culprits of this loss.

COMMUNITY GENERATORS

Social contacts are, oftentimes, spawned at community generators, or places which are especially encouraging spots for meeting. Small towns traditionally foster

¹² Oldenburg, *op cit.*, p. 23.

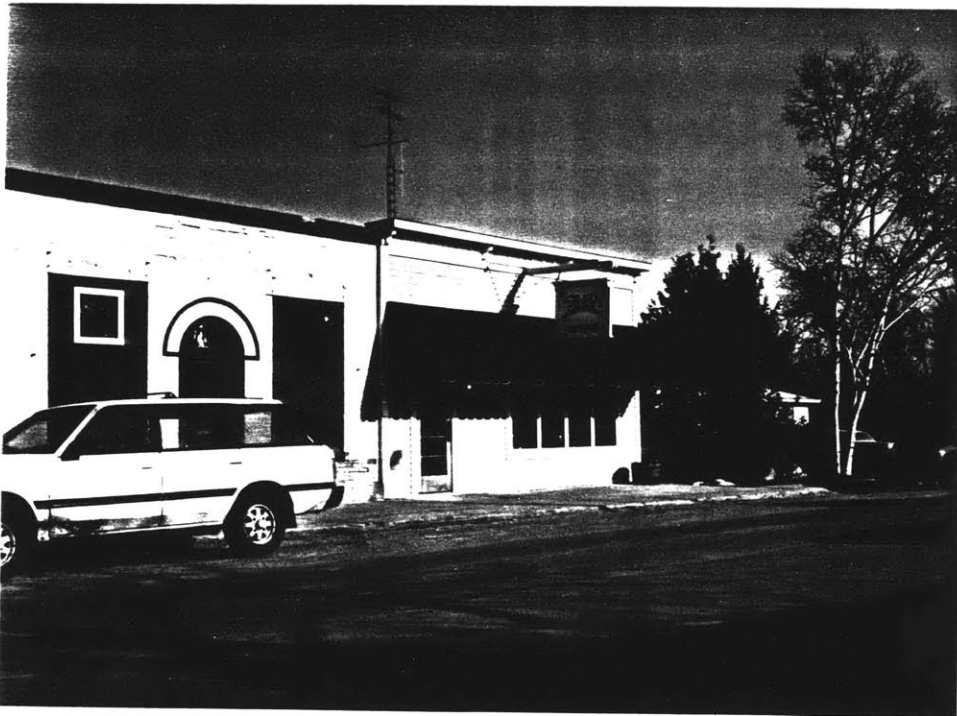
¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁵ Robbins, Jim. "Tourism Trap: The Californication of the American West," *Utne Reader*: July/Aug. 1991 (excerpted from *Northern Lights*, Winter 1991), p. 91.

'meaningful' contact, by their streetscapes, older businesses, and meeting and eating places. If these places and elements disappear, the locals no longer have anywhere to meet and mingle serendipitously.

Ray Oldenburg spends an entire book, *The Great Good Place: Coffee Shops, Cafes, Beauty Parlors, Bars, Hangouts and How They Get You Through the Day*, examining these 'elements'. He calls them third places, or "a generic designation for the great variety of public places which host the regular, voluntary, informal and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work."¹⁶ They are the cornerstones of community cohesiveness, and can be anything from Main Street itself, to local taverns and cafes, to the post office; anywhere that people meet each other informally and exchange news of the day or just spend time shooting the breeze. These public gathering spots nourish the relationships which are the essence of a small town.



Stubb's Restaurant, Waukazoo Street, Northport

All too often these places are separated (sometimes through planning and zoning) far from residential areas, so that people are isolated from their use and their benefits. People must often go a substantial distance in order to reach the nearest good selection of stores or bars or restaurants. Because of this, they will be much less likely to make the

¹⁶ Oldenburg, op cit., p. 11.

trip in the first place, and when they get there, they will not be as likely to see people that they know, making the visit less meaningful.¹⁷ The cycle of familiarity, incentive and benefits spirals downward. A renaissance of these sociable places and their benefits has the potential to breathe new life into towns and neighborhoods.

In Leelanau township, Northport is a hub of community generators, with restaurants such as Stubb's, a coffee house (where you serve yourself and pay by the honor system), and other meeting places like the fire hall. Stubb's is one of the few restaurants that stays open year-round, and by this standard locals qualify it as 'their' place. It reopened last year after having switched ownership many times in the past few years, with its 'new' name reflecting an old name of the restaurant and bar in its heyday. With the name, tradition and commitment to stay open year-round, interestingly when it did reopen, the locals immediately accepted it as a continuation of the old Stubb's -- which had gone out of business thirty or more years before.



In the left foreground, the honor-system Coffee House, Northport

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 33.



Happy Hour Tavern, M-22, between Northport and Leland

Down highway M-22 about seven miles there is a place called Happy Hour Tavern, almost exactly half way between Northport and the nearest village, Leland. Happy Hour Tavern has been part of the community for years, and its present owners have been running it for the past couple of decades. It is a true third place, and perhaps one of the reasons that it works so well is that it is *in between* these two towns. People that might otherwise not go into Northport or Leland will often stop by on their way home. People who live close by are more likely to see people that they know here, and are more likely to consider it their own place because it is 'in their neck of the woods.' Proximity spurs identification and familiarity.

Happy Hour exhibits the success and benefits of meeting places which are more convenient to residents. Perhaps the scattering of meeting places within residential areas will someday be encouraged by town planners. Unfortunately, this confronts the obstacle of how to fit these places into the traditional classifications of zoning. A Planning Commission member acknowledged that such uses are allowed within residential areas, but only under special permit. A problem lies in allocating new spaces to such uses because of the volatility of spot zoning. (Towns would risk nearby residents insisting that their properties be valued on the same basis as these meeting

places.) Also, there is the debate over drawing activity away from Northport's village center.

In essence, this could be a type of 'mixed-use' zoning. Cities have recognized mixed use development zoning as desirable for many years now. Perhaps a derivative of this idea will appear in rural zoning law in the future as the value of well-placed, intermittent community generators are recognized and accepted.

For some years now, the emphasis in the field of planning has been upon preserving town architectural character, historical buildings, open space, and so forth, but has only recently begun to approach how to preserve the essential dynamic of the community. Given the current amount of attention to the topic, it would suggest that increased value will be placed on how a sense of community is linked to environment. Geographers, historians, landscape architects, community developers, sociologists, psychologists, architects and developers are all approaching the topic of community because they realize the human need for interactive environments. Except,

There's only one problem. Most of the disciplines don't talk to each other and the information rarely reaches other people in other disciplines. And, the information certainly doesn't reach the general public which desperately needs ways to guide their hometowns on the perilous journey into the future...¹⁸

Planning is one realm where all of these "departments" could come together and shape the environment to better encourage community. Planners can gain a new perspective on their goals and tools, looking beyond just architecture and aesthetics to address how people live and interact with one another. By recognizing the importance of people interacting with each other, small towns can begin to grasp a more full understanding of what sense of place really is.

¹⁸ Munsell, op cit., p. 3.

CHAPTER 4

AUTHENTICITY

Jon's Barber Shop stands as a fixture in Suttons Bay, a village about 15 minutes south of Northport. Besides providing haircuts and an earful of conversation, Jon also sells bait and tackle; he will pause in the middle of a haircut to dish out some nightcrawlers for a customer. The combination makes for an unlikely business, but one which has worked well in the community for decades. Its peculiar usefulness has a quirky, original appeal; so much so, in fact, that American Express came to this sleepy town last summer to film a commercial. Jon's is a place which is impossible to recreate; it has evolved in its own unique way over a period of many years.

Why a place, like Jon's Barber Shop, is authentic is often difficult to define. Authenticity is most often something that just happens, unconsciously and unpretentiously, making it hard to pinpoint. The term 'vernacular' may come the closest, meaning "forms that grow out of the practical needs of the inhabitants of a place and the constraints of site and climate."¹ Vernacular, authentic places, are those which have been built in a practical, indigenous style, to serve a particular purpose, and people actually use them.

Authentic places can be termed a "lived-world of places," and "if we are at all concerned about the consequences and moral issues in uprooting and increasing geographical mobility and placelessness, then we must explore the possibility of developing an approach for making places self-consciously and authentically."² But this opens up a whole debate over what is authentic, and whether or not it is a contradiction in terms to *consciously create* something *authentic*. I would argue, first, that authenticity can be defined as fulfillment of two criteria: *appropriate design* and *genuine use*. Second, authenticity is a method which needs both close attention and room left for originality and individuality.

¹ Hough, op cit., p. 34.

² Relph, op cit., p. 147.

'AUTHENTIC' CRITERIA I: APPROPRIATE DESIGN

As with the other facets of sense of place, people often notice the effect of authenticity only after they lose it. The simplest and most blatant example is the arrival of chain fast food restaurants. Except where communities have protested, many towns and cities have been overrun by generic buildings which speak of uniformity and spoon-fed identity, rather than of identification with the places in which they sit. Many restaurant prototypes are identical. The same is often true with chain stores, hotels and many strip malls. The design is formulaic rather than responsive. In this light, a hypothesis that "purposeful design has done more to generate placelessness than to promote a sense of place," is understandable.³ When a building defines its purpose only, and not its relative location, and all places begin to look the same.

Or, in a similar way, revered international architectural styles may be emulated and transferred to somewhere where they are completely inappropriate. This decreases the unique identity of both the original and the copy. The proposed resort development on North Fox Island is just one example. The developers proudly state that it is modeled after Portofino, Italy. The design is vibrant, dense and attractive, but whether Portofino styling belongs in the middle of Lake Michigan remains to be determined. It would seem that the design of places should not be dictated by "arbitrary social and intellectual fashions,"⁴ but by more indigenous motivations. This means supporting *authenticity*, the factor which reflects and respects a place's unique mix of resources, people and landscapes.

Yet, the diagnosis of authenticity can prove to be tricky to administer. Authenticity strives to meet the design style of a community, but risks being tarnished by overkill. In reaching out to the meaning of a community, design may go too far, try too hard, and become contrived. Plans may sound logical but will look foolish. Connections will be so conscious as to be obvious. As Ian Nairn asserted twenty-five years ago about the American landscape, design must be conscious, but not self-conscious.⁵ Design should try to agree with its neighbors, not copy them. Historical details and material should not be used "slavishly," rather they should inspire creations which are combinations of the new and old, the proven and the experimental.⁶

³ Hough, op cit., p. 179.

⁴ Relph, op cit., p. 64.

⁵ Nairn, Ian. *The American Landscape*. New York: Random House, Inc., 1965, p. 6.

⁶ Mackin, et al., op cit., p. 19.

'AUTHENTIC' CRITERIA II: GENUINE USAGE

The second aspect of authenticity is that a place be truly used. It needs to attract and/or generate activity, and serve the needs of the people of the community. In the previous section, chain restaurants failed the test of appropriate design. However, it can be argued that they serve a function for the residents of a community. For reasons of convenience, economy and known expectations these restaurants do flourish; they pass the test of actual use simply by holding their own in the consumer marketplace. While they may not be redeeming architecturally, they still serve a purpose. It is a commonly seen phenomena.

A more difficult distinction, and more subtle danger, is if a place has appropriate design, but is not genuinely used. This can often be a pitfall of overzealous preservation or tourism attraction, despite careful, conscientious planning. One example, fictionalized by Boston Globe columnist Clif Garboden, is a town which was so committed to restoring the past that it kills off the few living, useful elements that the town had left. Emmetsborough (the caricature of a historic small New England town) chose to pour its resources into trifles -- street lamps, cobbled pavement, facades -- without acknowledging the true workings and quirks of the community, nor its existence in the *present*. Current businesses were forced into the mold of the past, reducing their actual usefulness and need. Circulation patterns were changed even though they were functional. House colors were chosen for their architectural accuracy, "despite some initial resistance when the annotations on dusty plot plans revealed an unexpected affection on the part of the town's first families for puce and taupe clapboard."⁷ The community was treated as a museum, not as a place for people to live and work. Garboden inherently concluded that a useful and interactive community has the best chance of keeping its true character, not a forced, 'architecturally correct' one.

What is important, then, is that communities recognize that just by protecting the physical framework it may not protect a town's sincerity, its authenticity. A town reflects its people and the time, both of which are ever-changing entities. Arguably, these entities need to be left to their own devices to shape vernacular communities which satisfy their needs. This does not suggest replacing planning with anarchy or loose controls; instead, "the true role of design [planning] is to sow the seeds from which local processes take off by themselves."⁸ A forced identity will never be a true identity. A framework (shaping landscape and even community) can outline main

⁷ Garboden, Clif. "Preservation," *The Boston Globe Magazine*, Feb. 9, 1992, p. 11.

⁸ Hough, op cit., p. 210.

directions and possibilities, but then individuals need to be allowed to make and affect their own places. This is the essence of a vernacular, authentic landscape.

Successful local endeavors can even protect against outside, generic forces. When township officials were asked about the noticeable lack of chain fast-food restaurants around the county, they responded that none had ever tried to move in. They attributed it to the fact that, first, since Leelanau is a peninsula, there is not a year-round critical mass of people to support a chain restaurant. But secondly and more importantly, there are enough local restaurants to fill the demand. In Northport there are a range of restaurants, all locally owned, which fit the bill for everything from pizza to burgers to steaks; as long as these vernacular restaurants fill the demand, there is no need for the chains to move in. Whether this second reason is actually more important than sheer demographics in the eyes of chain restaurant scouts is questionable, but it raises an appealing argument.

Communities with genuine use often are able to supply their own needs in their own ways. They reflect their attributes and histories, while not becoming bogged down with them. In this manner, maintaining sense of place is not automatically preservation. We do not need to bring back the past, nor would elements of the past always satisfy the needs of today. Instead, we need to study the planning principles and causality of the past, as well as the present, maintaining the best traditions while improving with new ones. "The critical question is not whether the small town can be rehabilitated in the image of its earlier strength and growth--for it clearly cannot--but whether American life will be able to evolve any other integral community to replace it."⁹ Small towns can be allowed room to change and develop constructively, to better reflect the personalities and motivations of its residents. This unique, collective personality is the core, and the underlying intrigue, of a vernacular landscape.

REFLECTIONS OF DESIGN AND USE: THE TIME FACTOR

A cornerstone of authenticity, then, is use and appropriateness to and by the people. Design must make sense for the culture and the time¹⁰; buildings which have been "born out of the needs of their time [can] become symbols of an era and a country."¹¹ Even if the use disappears, it remains a solid part of a community's history, etched into the landscape. This is true of prior logging towns, railway or shipping hubs, or

⁹ Oldenburg, *op cit.*, p. 3.

¹⁰ Campbell, Robert. *The Mayor's Institute on City Design*, Lecture. April 4, 1992.

¹¹ Hough, *op cit.*, p. 188.

industrial areas, where sawmills, depots, ports and textile mill buildings add to the present-day texture and identity of a community. Needs and values are constantly evolving, and the ability to adapt is a part of genuine use. The fabric of built form must have the ability to grow with evolving communities, to adapt to the conditions of the present, as a "collective reaction of people to the environment over *time*."¹²

Adaptive reuse is a challenge to the question of authenticity. As an example, the reuse of old textile mill buildings (to use a New England example) as incubator small business space is a natural progression of the needs of the industrial and business economy. The buildings can maintain their history and identity, and at the same time are useful and appropriate for the present generation of users. Past and present complement one another with added layers of meaning. Even a change in uses, for example to condominiums, can represent a shift in needs from large industrial space to growing residential population needs.

What does become a problem is when the built environment does not meet the needs of a community. When design becomes "the prerogative of elite groups and individuals rather than an articulated expression of the values of all members of a community," the community can begin to break down.¹³ Unresponsive redevelopment of our mill building, for example, can be as useless to authenticity as a nonconforming skyscraper. If the mill building were to be converted to yet another mall or museum in a place already filled with them, its significance would decrease. In a place which is losing its connection to the locals, if the building becomes just another in a string of buildings being developed for tourism, it would be inauthentic. Vernacular design must find the real needs of the present generation of residents and strive for a genuine response to the meanings, symbols, qualities and history of the community.

In Northport, there are two noticeable fixtures from eras past: the train depot building (train service has long since stopped) and Willowbrook, a prior waterwheel-powered mill. The depot building now houses an insurance agent, George Anderson, a longtime and well-known resident. He could have chosen to locate in Traverse City, where he would likely have a wider clientele, but instead he remained in Northport. Both the depot building and the business housed within continue to serve the townspeople. This adaptive reuse is one which meets the new generation of needs of the local people.

¹² Ibid., p. 180.

¹³ Relph, *op cit.*, p. 71.



The Depot, George W. Anderson Agency, Inc., Northport



The Willowbrook Ice Cream Parlor & Restaurant, Northport

Willowbrook, on the other hand, has been lost. As an ice cream parlor, it has fallen to tourist conventions of T-shirts and knick-knacks. One planning commission member commented that she eats ice cream there once a year when her nephew comes to visit, but otherwise, she doesn't go at all. There are likely many other locals who no longer stop there. While tourists are a legitimate part of Northport's history and an ice cream parlor is not in itself a *bad* use, the place's attractiveness has been lost for locals. Residents are able to appreciate the building visually, but not necessarily socially. A strong part of their own history and identity has been surrendered by this particular building being geared toward outsiders. As one of the few visually historical buildings in town, its potential is underutilized. The parlor has the potential of reaching to both locals and to tourists, insulting neither, and creating a more vibrant and meaningful link between past and present uses.

Whether the North Fox Island proposal is authentic is a difficult question of purpose and time. The developer is in the highly unusual position of having a completely uninhabited piece of land and no abutting neighbors. In the past the island served only as a sailing resting port and lumber harvesting area. The only traces which remain are a rustic airstrip from the 1950's and a few dirt two-tracks. The authentic nature or purpose for the island is unclear. As a result, this is where much debate flares between the developer and the mainland residents.

The argument over what is right for the island laps over into other arguments such as those of density, open space and environmental concerns. On one hand, it could be argued that a resort is a real use for the people and the present time. There is certainly an active market for these types of units in Leelanau County, as proven by the continued success of The Homestead, the first large-scale condominium community in the county. Building starts in the county reached an all-time high in 1991, undaunted in the face of a national recession. Two nearby Lake Michigan islands, Beaver Island and Mackinaw Island, have been havens for vacationers for years. Many mainland residents, however, do not share this pro-growth perception of the authentic use for North Fox Island. Instead, they argue that the island should reflect the present environmental concerns and therefore remain natural. Still others argue that the developer should be made to follow mainland density allowances, where he would be allowed only about 140 units instead of his proposed 642. In this situation, where time and purpose are not predefined, there is no easy solution.

THE CHALLENGE AND THREAT OF TOURISM

Tourism is proving to be one of the few recession-proof industries in the United States, and towns and cities are working to cash in on the bonanza. Tourism is among the top three industries in 46 states. It is the third largest retailer and the second largest employer in the United States; it is a \$350 billion industry. And growing.¹⁴

With all of its benefits, tourism unfortunately risks masking and eventually suffocating the original community's purposes, interactions and meanings. While tourism encourages the discovery of history, amenities and unique characteristics, it can slide into exploitation. In tourism development, "when the environmental and social values on which [a community] depends are absent, the rich diversity of the natural and cultural landscape is degraded and somewhere becomes anywhere."¹⁵ Scenery can become tarnished and small towns may buckle under the weight of development. Locals may end up poorly paid by this service-sector industry, in a market which often becomes increasingly more expensive to live in.¹⁶

In the face of the North Fox Island development, one editorial written to the Leelanau Enterprise took an unusual but thought-provoking stance: if this high-price development was built off-shore, that the base on shore (Northport) would be no more than 'servant's quarters.' The mayor of the village later responded that, like it or not, a strong part of Northport's business identity was, in fact, catering to tourists. This divergence in points of view reflects the intrinsic debate over whether tourism actually benefits locals, and at what price.

Beyond the economic effects, the risk to sense of place is tremendous as well. The promotion of an area for tourism can quickly slide into kitsch and convention. Kitsch, when history or appeal is specifically created for its consumption by the masses, is generically appealing, "sweetly sentimental", and horridly inauthentic. It is catering to the tourist's standard expectations of what a historic spot or vacation should be, where "the act and means of tourism becomes more important than the places visited."¹⁷ This is 'tour book check-off visiting' at its best: find a place, take pictures to prove you were there, and leave. Local residents can easily be lost within such an environment if the significance of the local community and its workings have been sacrificed.

¹⁴ Denney, Valerie. "All That Glitters May Be Slag," *Utne Reader*, July/Aug. 1991 (excerpted from *The Neighborhood Works*, Dec. 1990/Jan. 1991), p. 94.

¹⁵ Hough, op cit., p. 149.

¹⁶ Robbins, op cit., p. 88.

¹⁷ Relph, op cit., p. 82.

Yet there is a ray of hope: the newer breed of tourist is looking for 'authentic' places and experiences. "Developers in such communities are challenged to avoid contrived quaintness and to provide a living-learned landscape that benefits the poorest residents and the community as a whole," advocates argue.¹⁸ This has proven true in some communities, and is encouraging. If there is a market for such authenticity, it has a better hope of surviving.

As Randy Hester helped Manteo to do, residents of a town can prioritize what they are willing to sacrifice, and not sacrifice, for the sake of tourism. They can realize that their inner workings of their town contributes to their appeal, as well as to their own workability during and beyond the tourist season. J.B. Jackson advocated avoiding "other-directed architecture,"¹⁹ which is specifically geared toward outsiders (i.e. tourists), and reflects nothing of the people living and working there. By staying true to its own needs and values, a place remains authentic. In return, this authenticity remains appealing in the present and the long run for both tourists and locals.

¹⁸ Denney, op cit., p. 97.

¹⁹ Jackson, John Brinckerhoff. *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984, p. 45.

CHAPTER 5

LEGAL RIGHTS IN PLANNING FOR SENSE OF PLACE

When trying to preserve sense of place, the debate simmers about taking private property value for the public good. Over the past century a clear trend has developed in allowing the taking of private land value on the bases of aesthetics or quality-of-life. In this way, planning has been given increased power by the courts and by legislation to provide for the 'health and general welfare' of communities by mandating environmental design. Indeed, "no trend is more clearly defined in planning law than that of courts upholding regulations whose primary purpose is aesthetics."¹

The legal rights issues concerning planning for sense of place include three topics. The first is the debate between private and public interests, as mentioned above. Second is the legal precedent upon which regulation can be built. This includes the acceptance of aesthetics as basis for action, and also the right of towns being able to shape their own communities, to be self-selective. This latter right treads warily into debates of exclusionary zoning and appropriateness of goals. Thirdly is the issue of how to legitimize regulations and policy tools which promote sense of place. Precedent serves as a partially firm basis, but will have to be paired with innovation, and most importantly, justification in the form of strong community support.

PRIVATE VS. PUBLIC GOOD

Leelanau County is just one example of a place where land use regulations could dramatically affect private rights and lifestyles. Citizen respondents to a county survey reported that 42% owned waterfront property.² Another significant percentage likely owns property with views.

While the battles of the past may have been among those most immediately affected and concerned about economics and use, the battles of the present are a struggle among competing fundamental values about how the land should be used and the lifestyles associated with that use.³

¹ Mantell, Michael A., Stephen F. Harper and Luther Propst. [The Conservation Foundation] *Creating Successful Communities: A Guidebook to Growth Management Strategies*. Washington DC: Island Press, 1990, p. 98.

² Anderson, Niebuhr & Associates (The Leelanau General Plan), op cit., p. 27.

³ Daneke, Gergory A., Margot W. Garcia and Jerome Delli Priscoli, eds. *Public Involvement and Social Impact Assessment*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, Inc., 1983, p. 146.

With the many resources present in the county, how residents use the land is a strong function of their lifestyles. Particularly in small towns or rural areas, residents have the most to protect, but they are, at the same time, often the most idealistically adamant in protecting their private property rights. This is true in the case in the Leelanau area. People are strongly connected to the land and scenery through farming the land and/or by owning a piece of it. To them, pride in the landscape and pride in private ownership go hand in hand.

Regulating the preservation of resources carries symbolic and physical costs to residents particularly to those who own amenities or farms or view property. The *Connecticut River Valley Design Manual* advocates building away from waterfronts, hiding developments (which may mean sacrificing the best views) and living at a higher density. However, this is in contrast to the exact reasons why many people have lived in, and are moving to, Leelanau County. They want to have their own piece of waterfront, a piece of sky, a breathtaking view, a swatch of land. When asked, even planning commission members admitted that given a piece of land, they would most likely build on the best spot for their own uses. (see p. 18) As planners, they did not feel right in determining where people could site their houses, even though there are some glaringly bad examples in the township of what this can produce. They felt uncomfortable denying farmers of the full value of their land if and when they wanted to sell it. They felt that mandating Connecticut River Valley-type morals would restrict these land values unfairly.

The sacrifice of private land rights for the public good may be an ideal that is more convincing in the higher density Northeast. In the Midwest where the amenities seem to be in abundance (even if they are slipping away) the argument is not as apparent. Midwest residents will have to reach more of a crisis stage, and more of the resources will have to be lost, unfortunately, before action will seem justified. Policies must be a reflection of the ideals of the community, not of a disinterested party, no matter how well-intentioned.

LEGAL BASIS FOR COMMUNITY REGULATION

Most of the tricky questions dealing with regulating aesthetics or other community aspects are centered around whether the action is legitimate and whether it serves its purpose. This is called substantive due process, which “requires that land use regulations have some ‘reasonable tendency to promote’ or a ‘substantial relationship to’

the public health, safety, morals, or general welfare.”⁴ Two major cases have given legal precedent to communities wishing to regulate on the bases of aesthetics and local values.

The first case, *Berman v. Parker* (1954), supported that government planning action could be based solely on aesthetic values; it concluded that, “The concept of the public welfare is broad and inclusive... The values it represents are spiritual as well as physical, aesthetic as well as monetary.”⁵ Before this time, aesthetics had to be paired with the more tangible values:

...while courts of this era [from the turn of the century to, roughly, 1970] were generally sympathetic to aesthetic regulations such as sign controls and height restrictions, they generally clothed such enactments in terms of fire protection, safety and economics. Aesthetics were considered to be a matter of luxury and taste; courts generally struck down laws if they were based solely on aesthetic considerations.⁶

For the first time, regulation based upon aesthetics was upheld by the courts, leading to greater power in the battle over community appearances and control.

The second case, *Village of Belle Terre v. Boraas* (1974) found that zoning could legitimately be used to promote pleasant neighborhoods, to “lay out zones where family values, youth values, and the blessings of quiet seclusion and clean air make the area a sanctuary for people.”⁷ The case itself upheld local regulations which prohibited a property owner from renting a dwelling in a certain community to a group of six unrelated college students because they did not fit the criteria of a “family.” The case creates strong reverberations for communities wishing to promote certain lifestyles or uses for the sake of quality of life.

These two cases represent significant steps in the push toward cities and towns being able to protect their communities, based on aesthetics and values. Since the 1970’s, legal rights have evolved quickly and local governments now have “great leeway” in working to protect these less tangible aspects of their character and sense of place.⁸

⁴ Brower, David J., Candace Carraway, Thomas Pollard and C. Luther Propst. *Managing Development in Small Towns*. Washington DC: APA Planners Press, 1984. This book serves as a very manageable, concise guide to the legal bases and challenges for a wide range of growth management tools.

⁵ *Berman v. Parker*, 348 U.S. 26 (1954). Interestingly, this case promoted the ideals of urban renewal. It found in favor of destroying a productive property in a run-down neighborhood, for the sake of the neighborhood redevelopment. Even if motivations have changed, the legal precedent remains important.

⁶ Duerksen, Christopher J. *Aesthetics and Land Use Controls: Beyond Ecology and Economics*. Washington, DC: APA Planning Advisory Service Report Number 399, December 1986, p. 3.

⁷ *Village of Belle Terre v. Boraas*, 416 U.S. 1 (1974) as referenced in Mandelker, Daniel R. *Land Use Law*, second edition. Charlottesville, VA: The Michie Company, Law Publishers, 1988, p. 57.

⁸ Duerksen, op cit., p. 4.

LEGITIMIZING SENSE OF PLACE REGULATION

As it stands today, programs based on aesthetics (such as scenic protection programs, open space mandates or design regulations) must stand up to two general tests in the court's eyes when they are challenged: they must serve a legitimate public purpose, and they cannot deny a landowner the *complete* use of his/her property.

The courts are watching to see that communities are not being arbitrary in their judgments and that they have a proven commitment to their ideals. Even if communities do not have a written or stated program on aesthetics, courts may still uphold their rights, based upon their track record which shows a commitment to their ideals. However, the best way to implement a design program is by making it as 'air tight' as possible. Clarity is the goal, and it can be reached with a combination of approaches.

First is by justification. Reasoning behind policies must be carefully outlined. Even though *Berman v. Parker* allows regulation on the basis of aesthetics alone, it is still in a community's interest to link the reasoning to tangible goals whenever possible, such as economic growth, existing master plan agendas, public health and safety, and protection of property values or the environment. Connections created to control property rights toward certain ends must be reasonable and appropriate. Second is clarity in decision making processes. They must be specifically spelled out to guarantee results, with little decision-making based upon the personal discretion of the planning board or township officials or whomever may be carrying out the program. Arbitrariness needs to be avoided.

Furthermore, in proving a commitment to design ideals, the community as a whole must be supportive of the program. This means documenting the process well, involving the public as well as experts, and reaching consensus wherever possible. The process must be instituted *before* a project comes to the table for approval. Ideally it can make the approvals process more predictable for both the planning commissions and the private sector.⁹

Many of these factors have been learned by experimentation, and in past cases are clues as to how to preserve the remaining two facets of sense of place: community and authenticity. In Randy Hester's Manteo project, Hester was the first to admit that the town's Development Guidelines to preserve community patterns were vulnerable to

⁹ Porter, Douglas R. , Patrick L. Phillips and Terry J. Lassar. *Flexible Zoning: How It Works*. Washington, DC: Urban Land Institute, 1988, p. 66.

legal challenges. In order to legitimize the goals as firmly as possible, Hester used several different avenues: formal adoption by the town of the Development Guidelines (and therefore the "Sacred Structure"), creation of a special village business district so that a conditional use permit would be required for all new development (at which time the development could be deliberated by the community as to whether it adversely affected the "Sacred Structure"), and state historic recognition for the few buildings and corridor areas that could fulfill the criteria. However, this did not serve to completely dispel his uncertainty in its legal firmness:

These legal mechanisms remain unchallenged primarily because there is such strong local support for their intent. In effect for eight years [as of 1990], they now have the power of tradition on their side. It is questionable, however, if they could have protected the Sacred Structure if challenged in court... Had the people had the slightest disagreement about the importance of the sacred places, it would have jeopardized their legal protection.¹⁰

There is strength in numbers and power in consensus. Likely the only battle they would lose, if they remained united as a group would be if the Guidelines were found racially or otherwise discriminatory, or somehow hypocritical in their fulfillment of their goals.

Although Manteo merely stood the test of time, not necessarily of the courts, it is still an important testimony to the power of identifying goals, creating concrete processes, and having a strong backbone of community consensus. These will be the 'legitimization' tools that will need to be used in future attempts to protect character, community and authenticity.

¹⁰ Hester, Randolph T. Jr. "The Sacred Structure in Small Towns: A Return to Manteo, North Carolina," *Small Town*, Jan./Feb. 1990, p. 20.

CHAPTER 6

TAKING STEPS

Northport and Leelanau have a good start in working to preserve sense of place. Leelanau updated its Master Plan in 1990, and Northport in 1987. Northport is drawing up design guidelines. Although very few, if any, village and township officials are trained planners per se, they substitute for this with concern, effort and close attention. Consultants have been utilized to help create and review plans and guidelines. They also have two sources -- the County and the Grand Traverse Bay Regional Commission -- working on the larger regional issues. Yet, what else can be done to secure Leelanau's sense of place?

Leelanau, and every other small town, needs to build upon what makes it unique. Therefore, a response to the question is not a set of specific answers, but rather a discussion of the processes and perspectives to help *find* the answers. Only the residents of Leelanau can truly determine specific solutions. Sense of place planning -- through Landscape, Community and Authenticity -- can provide a basis for these processes and perspectives, as outlined below.

LANDSCAPE. All of the processes which Leelanau and Northport presently are involved with concern Landscape issues. In Townscape, Countryside and Regional Balance, they are taking strides in design guidelines, Master plans and regional plans as described above. But there is more room for innovation. The physical realm is a framework which can be strengthened to become more supportive of the sense of place.

◇ **In Townscape design, look at relationships as well as individual ingredients.**

To further quality and cohesiveness of design, a local design review committee is an option to strongly consider. Each new building affects the fabric which is Leelanau; looking at the impacts more closely *before* construction may lead to better designs for the owner and the community. Individual villages and towns will probably not find it feasible to create a committee, but they could spearhead the creation of one on, perhaps, the county level. Leelanau County is small enough of a region to have a manageable program, and as a whole it would likely have enough projects to make the program worthwhile. Commission members could include a mix of local design professionals, planning officials and residents with a keen interest. With a design review committee

process in place, relationships within the environment could be considered comprehensively for the benefit of the towns and villages, individually and collectively.

◇ **Involve residents as ‘expert locals.’**

Professional architectural critics often say that the best critics are the people on the street, the amateurs, because they know whether a building is good simply by whether they *like* it. In this case, local residents themselves can often be the best judges as to what fits in their town or village. On one level, residents could be involved with the design review committee, as mentioned above. Second, residents should be involved in finalizing design guidelines to balance the expertise of the consultants with the perspective of a local. If Northport’s new guidelines were opened up to discussion by the community, residents could potentially improve the standards, and they could gain a raised awareness for the design issues themselves. The higher the amount of input on the part of the community, the higher the understanding and respect for the resources at stake.

◇ **Debate issues of private property rights versus the public good.**

On the Countryside and Regional Balance levels, issues of private property rights versus the common good may have, or will soon, arise. At some point, Leelanau will need to weigh this balance to reconcile where and how far to tread on private rights. The debate stretches into issues of siting of houses and businesses, of landscape requirements (usually for businesses), of open space preservation, of historic or natural resource preservation, and many others. Without a resolution, conflicting ideals and lack of agreement may render any regional or county design/planning manual ineffective. Design manuals represent suggestions, and unless they are tailored to the ideals of the people specifically living there, they may end up carrying little weight. Northport and Leelanau can personalize the generalizations of the county and regional advisors to make them most effective.

◇ **Accentuate the connections between the individual and landscape.**

Steps can be taken to accentuate the individual and the landscape, so that they may be more strongly intertwined. To accentuate the individual, Northport and Leelanau could, for example, open up the work of local artists and producers to the residents, not just the tourists. Promote the history of the village and the township. Continue support of local festivals and gatherings, such as the Fish Boil, Food and Wine Festival

and Fourth of July Fireworks, and perhaps encourage new traditions. Steps can also be taken to improve the environment to affect the individual. Use creative signage. Gain historic preservation status for places such as Omena's post office and country store, to raise awareness of the buildings' long-standing contribution to the community. Obtain more land for public use (especially water access) if possible so that residents as a whole may enjoy more of the amenities of the area. Create trails for walking and/or biking across the township or county. Contributions such as these connect individuals to the landscape, and vice versa, through increased knowledge, appeal and tradition.

COMMUNITY. The village and town are at a point where they could gain great benefits from fully analyzing their community dynamic. Growth looms on the horizon, and it seems only a matter of time before Northport will see growth like that which has been facing villages to the south, such as Leland and Suttons Bay. The timing is perfect to preserve the essential parts of Northport and Leelanau as new growth moves in, rather than after the fact.

◇ **Recognize the crucial spots around the village and town.**

Particularly with the discussion raised over the proposed development of North Fox Island, residents are likely ready to talk in a more specific manner about how they would like their village and town to be. Begin with a mapping, by as many residents of the town as possible, of both the important buildings and the traditions behind the places. Take these results and work toward a consensus of the most important traits; from there, take an active interest in these places in the future.

Taking an active interest means encouraging or discouraging uses which will affect these places. For example, encourage local businesses and residents to take an interest in places beyond their property lines. Recently, an abutter to the Willowbrook Ice Cream Parlor came into the township offices wondering what he should do about his willow tree; it sits on his property but is the namesake of Willowbrook, and is threatening to fall over. Should he cut it down or try to save it? The village can intercede to promote collective solutions. This example may be more obvious than other situations, since the Willowbrook has a distinct interest, but encouraging other group efforts can raise camaraderie and awareness as well as funds or resources which could not otherwise be raised by a single landowner or business.

Other scenarios could include preserving or maintaining buildings on public lands when the local government no longer has funds. Or it could involve protecting certain

trees (the Christmas tree), waterways (the Mill Pond), buildings (the Depot), lands abutting local parks or scenic areas, or even just roadsides, all which might otherwise languish under individual attention. Even facades themselves can be protected through the purchase of easements. Analogies to this kind of activity could be a variation on Leelanau Conservancy (a local conservancy group) which focuses upon the *built* instead of the *natural* environment to protect 'endangered' areas, or a type of 'Chamber of Commerce' which promotes not the businesses but on the outward form of the businesses. The form of intervention is common; although the focus may be different, the approach could be the same, to actively promote the good of the community.

◇ **Strengthen the community dynamic.**

Issues of community dynamic have not yet been specifically approached by Leelanau nor Northport, but they each have significant communities in place which could benefit from study and mapping. If a more structured approach is possible, patterns within the village could be analyzed in conjunction with a consultant with landscape architecture or similar skills background. On a smaller scale, merely recognizing particularly important spots, meanings and community patterns can have a positive effect on many planning decisions.

For example, Northport village has 'gaps' on its 'Main Street' which represent opportunities for future improvement of the community core. The town presently has strong community generators, such as the post office, library, bank, grocery store and restaurants; the goal should be to improve this already solid dynamic. One such 'gap,' for example, is the drug store/soda fountain. This older building enjoys little business since pharmacy services were moved up to the hospital. If the hospital needs more space in the future, the village could suggest bringing the pharmacy services back down to the core of the town; this would revitalize the drug store as well as strengthen the community fabric and usefulness of the village center. Keeping community dynamic in mind means protecting what exists and strengthening it with new channels of activity.

◇ **Recognize people as a resource.**

Besides encouraging interaction between the members of a community, this approach suggests that the realm of planning also can reach out to the people themselves. Planning can recognize the need to provide new jobs (other than just tourism) and affordable housing for the people of a community. Residents are a great resource in Leelanau and Northport, and opportunities need to be encouraged in order to enable these people to live here. Perhaps this will eventually mean paying for

infrastructure in the commercial development zones, or contributing to moderate-income or elderly housing. And villages and towns must go one step further, to give attention and care toward creating entities which are desirable to the whole community. Small, intimate places such as small towns and villages cannot settle for a business or a structure which will not be an asset in the long run. Securing community means reconciling people and the landscape into a combination which all residents can be proud of.

AUTHENTICITY. Northport and Leelanau have a range of examples, even just within the surrounding county, of differing levels of village and town authenticities. Northport itself is arguably one of the best local examples of a village remaining true to itself. By being 'lower key,' it has paid the price in a less stable 'Main Street' retail environment and a less vibrant tourist market, but it has maintained a stronger natural personality which reflects its residents more than tourists. Northport and Leelanau both have a great opportunity for maintaining an authentic town atmosphere simply because a strong basis is still intact. With a conscious valuing of authenticity, the town and village can shape decisions of use and design to further encourage the community's appealing, natural sense of place.

◇ **Encourage genuine use. Keep the town alive and appealing for *residents*.**

I asked the planning commission members their opinion about a certain strategy utilized by Randy Hester in Manteo. To maintain authenticity, such that the people still felt that Manteo was 'their town,' Hester helped institute regulations that tourist shops be balanced with shops for local residents. Specifically, this required that at least one shop on each side of the street cater largely to locals. The idea intrigued the Leelanau planners, but of course they also saw the difficulty of defining and regulating such a proviso. The importance of such a discussion is to spur thought on the need for towns and villages to remain useful for residents, not just outsiders, and then to think of ways of promoting this. Randy Hester used regulation; community awareness and recommendations to local businesses (perhaps in the form of awards, direct advice or advisory guidelines) could also be used to encourage businesses and services to remain useful for residents.

◇ **Strive for appropriate design.**

While keeping uses authentic, design appropriateness must also be kept in mind. Northport's design regulations will be a benefit to the community, as long as there is an understanding that they are not a final design answer. If all buildings in the near future were built with false second story facades, it would be an illogical representation of Northport; it would be inauthentic and contrived. Northport's architecture represents a *collection* of many different kinds of features which work well together. In this case, implementation of guidelines must be paired with the common sense, meaning the common sense to walk outside of the town or village offices, take a look around and ask: How well will a building fit into, and affect, the overall design fabric? With this perspective, design can better remain authentic in its itself and in its relation to the rest of the community.

While the perspectives and examples above specifically reference one specific small town and village, the ideals are transferable to other small towns. Sense of place stresses the power of individuality, a condition which, ideally, all small towns have in 'common.' The creative processes, corresponding to the three levels, work to reveal the individuality of each small town.

Individuality is the result of a unique combination of people and their place; therefore steps taken in planning will benefit greatly by having the concern and involvement of the residents. Citizen participation lends legitimacy as well as the common sense of lay people. It contributes the crucial ingredient of *values*. Values shape individuality; values shape the landscape, community and authenticity. Before any steps of sense of place protection can be taken, a town must recognize how the people value private and public property lands, design, natural resources and so forth, and how these values have shaped the environment.

With this knowledge, a town will be better able to institute tools of open space protection, design controls, community preservation or tourist growth. The power of towns to manage growth has increased substantially in recent years, but in order to do the most good, implementation efforts must match the ideals of the people, not just those of the most current planning innovators. It is not so much the 'newfangled,' modern tools which can be integrated into planning, although they may be intriguing or functional. The emphasis needs to be how towns can hold onto their community roots and personality. Just as design should not be borrowed and placed where it is not

applicable, so too community protection methods should not be accepted without careful scrutiny and tailoring.

In an earlier discussion, it was suggested that in the face of growth, it is not so much what is added, but what you can stay close to. Sense of place planning persuades towns to stay close to their individuality, their unique identity. Towns must work to find, and to reflect, the values which shape this individuality. With this firm understanding of the ingredients of their sense of place, then, no matter what is added, the community as a whole can better survive and flourish.

**APPENDIX
AND
BIBLIOGRAPHY**

APPENDIX

THE ROLE OF THE PLANNER

I chose this study as an exploration of what makes small towns special, and it necessarily grew into a study of how to protect these qualities. Particularly, how could planning work to protect the sense of place? A question then shifted from the 'doing' to the 'doer' -- the planner. *Who* could work to protect sense of place? With a planner at the helm, results are often affected by how the planner sees his/her role. The changing role of the planner has reflected changes in ideals, and changes in legal rights and responsibilities. The planner has transformed from an expert, to a listener, and is now swinging back to be an expert, with listener capabilities: a consultant.

PLANNER AS EXPERT

Originally, the planner of twenty or thirty years ago was quietly concerned with carrying out the determination of land uses and efficiencies. The planner acted as an expert, a sort of detached diagnostician, one who had the correct answers based upon his/her expertise. Planning at the time was concerned with an economic type of efficiency, where the absence of 'clutter,' ethnic neighborhoods and older buildings and such, was a virtue (even though this 'clutter' was later determined to be a strong base for sense of place and identity).

The planner's status as expert began to crumble as the politics of planning became more controversial and scrutinized by the public. Special urban places were being lost to the bulldozers of Urban Renewal; countrysides and rural landscapes were being lost to the bulldozers of generic and synthetic 'progress.' Planning affected the workings of society, and planners of the 'old school' were not ready to assimilate the opinions, values and critiques of the people. Planning was finally being realized as a task of planning *society*, not just planning *space*.

PLANNER AS LISTENER

As the public began to assert its right to get involved in the planning process, planners began to learn the benefits of planning with the input of the people. Subjective opinions and values were no longer tossed out as being impossible to deal with; rather, they were recognized as a basis for making value judgments in policy decisions.

Planners, ideally, would act as guides, educated in the processes of decision making and able to lead people through the process so that they might arrive at their own conclusions.

A strong benefit of the community becoming involved and motivated was that changes came to be created by a wide range of views cooperating together. Decisions gained credibility. In the Connecticut River Valley Plan, a basic assumption was that “the Valley can continue to grow and develop economically without substantially altering its special scenic character and quality of life—but only with the concerned involvement of its citizens.”¹ Consensus, education and involvement became the buzzwords.

PLANNER AS CONSULTANT

The role of the planner now appears to be heading toward the role of a consultant, where he/she gives great attention to his/her client’s needs, but also relies on objectivity and expertise to arrive at (ideally) the best solution. Client relations, or the management of the process, is still crucial for success, but the planner also must bring in expertise that the community otherwise does not have. This expertise brings a greater awareness to the planning process, and planners are very recently beginning to assimilate cross-disciplinary methods into planning.

While the role of a ‘normal’ planner becomes more and more specialized (and therefore narrow) to address increasingly complex topics such as water quality or GIS or legal rights, the small town planner will necessarily continue to be a jack of all trades. A small town planner has the problem, or the opportunity, of having to plan for everything at once. The ideal small town planner will be a balance of an architect, scientist, sociologist, environmental psychologist, historian, geographer, advocate, and many other roles. With all of the levels of attention and expertise needed, the small town planner of future will necessarily be a ‘Renaissance’ individual.

This is the challenge.

¹ Yaro, et al., op cit., p. 10.

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A meeting of planning commission members was held on March 25, 1992 to discuss issues of sense of place.

Attendees were as follows:

From Leelanau Township:

Marlin Bussey
Kalin Johnson
Colleen Kalchik
David Korson
Kathleen Policoro
Joe Policoro (spouse)

From Village of Northport:

Richard Hufford