

Blueprint

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Shade structures have the potential to provide a comfortable walking environment even in the hottest months, to create connections between currently isolated places, to serve as a catalyst for urban infill and to provide the sense of place and character that are sorely lacking in our city.

If the light rail stations are not adequately cooled, as well as the parking lots where our cars will sit all day and the route from the parking lot to the station, we will be reluctant to leave our air-conditioned cars and wait for a train. Valley Connections, the organization responsible for planning the light rail, includes a special section in their Urban Design Guidelines devoted to cooling strategies written by Harvey Bryan and the late Jeffrey Cook,

both thermal experts from ASU. The success of the light-rail relies upon the implementation of these cooling strategies.

If these measures are effectively introduced on a wide scale, downtown Phoenix will house a significant residential population and will draw visitors who will have places to walk to comfortably year round. Once this occurs, people will walk not only with a destination in mind but simply to enter the urban fray, seeing and being

seen in the age-old urban tradition that forms the basis of a civil society. Phoenix will buzz with the urban vitality that attracts those who can choose where they would like to live. And those of us already here, who are collaboratively creating this city, will enjoy a higher quality of life and will be able to say, I remember when....

Nan Ellin is an associate professor in the College of Architecture and Environmental Design at Arizona State University.

Commentary

A Blueprint For Survival Of Metro Phoenix

Development Should Include 'Cool' Places To Walk

By NAN ELLIN

Ninety per cent of the Phoenix metropolitan area was built over the last half century, a period when urban development focused primarily on building highways, suburban tract housing and shopping malls. This led to the abandonment of our central cities and a sprawling metropolis that is now larger than the Los Angeles metropolitan area and larger than seven states, including Massachusetts.

Sprawl not only depletes our natural resources. As a number of recent studies demonstrate, sprawl takes an enormous toll on our physical and mental health contributing to automobile fatalities, obesity, asthma, workplace woes and suburban sorrows like boredom and isolation.

We cannot, however, retrace our steps and begin again. Nor should we banish the car. Rather, we must figure out a way to retrofit our metropolitan area so that it gracefully accommodates people as well as cars. How can we accomplish this? We need:

- more "mixed-use" urban pockets
- more alternatives to the car
- more passive cooling devices that provide comfort throughout the year.

Let's look at each of these more closely, focusing on downtown Phoenix.

Mixed-use: To insure more walking, we need more people downtown 24 hours, seven days a week. This requires increasing the residential population. More housing options would not only increase the amount of walking downtown, it would also decrease the number of workers who commute.

To assure social diversity, the city could implement "inclusionary zoning," a strategy that has been successful in New York City, the Washington D.C. area and Santa Fe, N.M. Inclusionary zoning involves setting aside a portion of new housing (usually about 15 per cent) for lower-income residents. Developers building in this area must either build affordable housing or contribute to a fund allocated toward this kind of housing.

In addition to increasing the range of housing options, we need to walk to more places. Years of urban dispersal have rendered walking prohibitive in most of the Valley. We need greater proximities through creating more "mixed use" developments where housing, offices, retail, restaurants, cafes, schools, arts and leisure activities and parks all co-mingle. Even in the densest urban residential pockets of downtown Phoenix, there is little to walk to since retail and other amenities are scarce. Many contend that "retail follows rooftops" in a natural progression, but in this chicken-and-egg situation, where there is a perception of risk for investors of both housing and retail, a swift and assured urban renaissance relies upon sub-

sides and other incentives.

And third in this category, zoning requirements must be modified in certain areas. Wide sidewalks with benches, landscaping, public art and parallel or diagonal parking along the street assure that buildings line the street to create "streetwalls" so that pedestrians feel that they are in an "outdoor room." The result is a sense of enclosure, safety and interest as pedestrians gaze at/into facades and as those inside watch

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passersby. The urban residential zoning that was established to allow Roosevelt Square at Portland Street and Central Avenue demonstrates these principles and efforts are currently underway to encourage infill on smaller lots by eliminating the two-acre minimum currently required. Two other important initiatives (in progress) should have a tremendous positive impact: Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) overlay districts along the light rail line [Tempe is developing a similar plan but is focusing only on the area around the light-rail stops and is calling it Pedestrian-Oriented Development (POD)] and a new master plan for the area north of Fillmore between Central Avenue and Seventh Street.

Although downtown revitalization has been substantial over the past few years, we need to accelerate our progress. One tool used by virtually every city that has successfully rebounded (these are referred to as "comeback cities" is tax increment financing (TIF). This tool allows a jurisdiction such as a municipality to declare a "tax increment district" and to acquire property within that district and resell it at a reduced price to pay demolition costs, finance on-site improvement and assist with relocating residents if necessary. The city would issue bonds that are then paid back with revenues from rising property values over the next 25 years. (If sufficient revenue is not generated, the city is liable to pay the shortfall.) In Arizona, however, TIF is currently unconstitutional.

Alternatives to the car: In addition to having more reasons to leave our cars behind, we need to have the ability to do so. The planned light rail and improved bus system are providing necessary alternatives to the car. "District parking," as found in

Santa Monica, Calif., and other cities, offers an excellent means of accommodating both cars and pedestrians in the city. Built and managed by cities, these clearly identified, easily accessible and well-run parking facilities provide ample and safe parking. This consolidation of parking removes a significant barrier to compact urban development. In addition, the elimination of parking requirements for each use offers a significant incentive to downtown development.

In our desert city, mixed-use development and alternatives to the car are not sufficient for a pedestrian-friendly environment. We also need:

Passive cooling: The last half-century during which most of Phoenix grew was also a period when urban development deliberately ignored local topography, climate, culture and history. As a result, we are a city that largely works against our natural setting rather than with it, leading to environmental devastation, economic costs and physical discomfort. The "heat-island effect," the result of substituting asphalt for the natural landscape, intensifies the magnitude of these problems as well as the need for remedying them.

The School of Architecture at Arizona State University has become a leading research center in cooling strategies for desert cities. Primary among these is an investigation into shade structures that range widely in scale, materials and costs.

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Telephone: (602) 258-7028
NEWS Fax: (602) 253-7836
LEGALS Fax: (602) 258-2504
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