

Part 1 - Planning for Narrow Local Streets



A two-part briefing before the Land Conservation and Development Commission on September 27, 2001

prepared by DLCD staff and members of the TGM program: Bob Cortright and Eric Jacobson

Narrow Local Streets



Presentation Overview

- Background
- Experience and Issues
- TPR Interpretation

I. Background - TPR Adopted in 1991

(Oregon's Transportation Planning Rule)



Narrow local residential streets, NOT:

- arterials
- collectors
- local streets in commercial and industrial areas

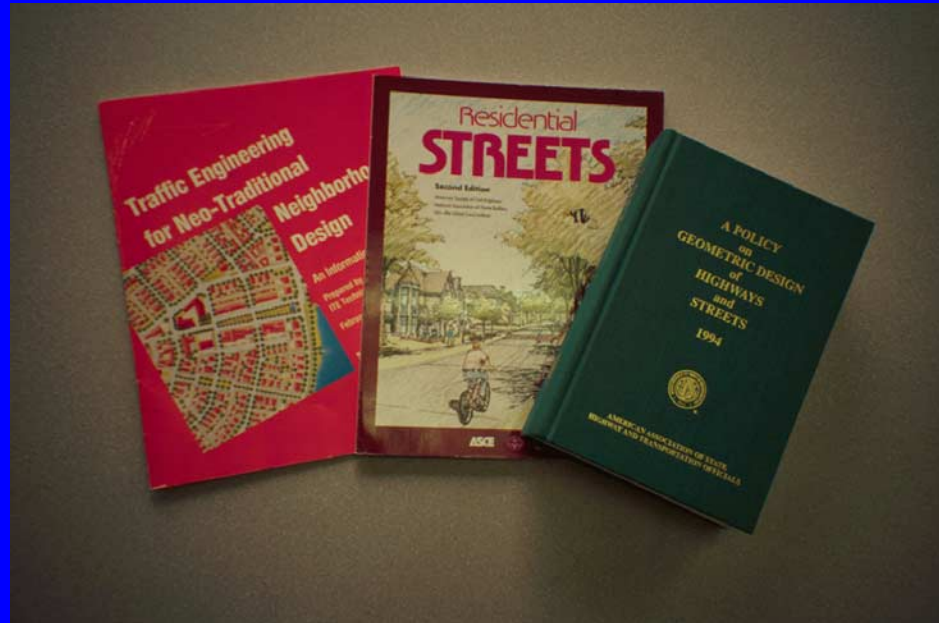
I. Background - TPR Adopted in 1991



1995 TPR Update -

Local governments
continuing to require
wide local residential
streets

I. Background - 1995 TPR Update



ITE

ULI

ASCE

NAHB

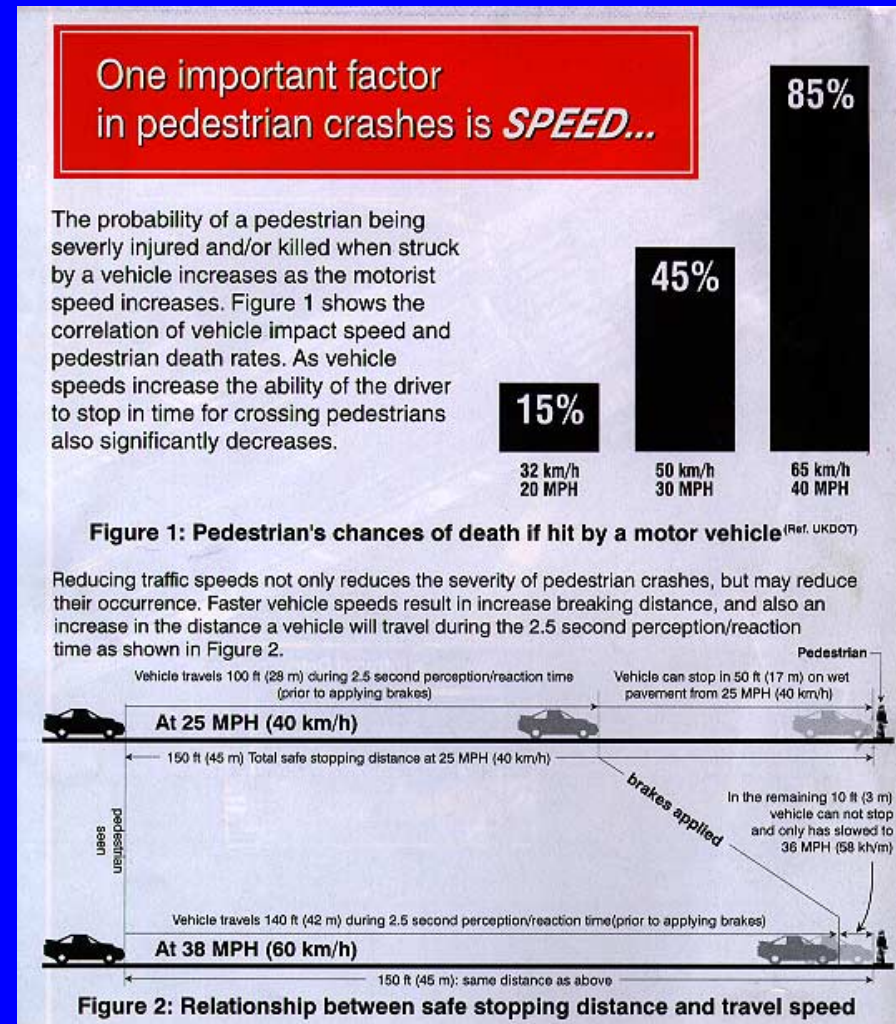
APA

AASHTO

National research shows narrow streets
are beneficial and recommended

I. Background - 1995 TPR Update

Narrow streets reduce speeds and are more safe



I. Background - 1995 TPR Update

LIFESTYLE

15 Ways to Fix the Suburbs

Most of us actually know what we want in a neighborhood—we just don't know how to get it, because developers have been building the wrong thing for 50 years. Here's how to get our communities back on track.



Moving day at Kentlands, the nontraditional suburb in Maryland where houses are close to the street and to each other.

FOR DECADES, ANTHONY NELSON OF BUTLER UNIVERSITY has been using the tools of science to pursue that most elusive and subjective quality, happiness. When a developer comes into a community, humbly seeking permission to re-create nature, Neilson sits on the site of an old Go Kart track, the town's planners commission Neilson to survey the populace and determine if that's what they'd actually like there. Using photographs, models and questionnaires, Neilson has surveyed people all over the country, and these are some of the things he's found.

■ "Everybody will call for a green open space in the middle—that's automatic. They will put the major community buildings around the plaza, then group the houses on relatively narrow streets. Ninety-nine percent don't want streets that are more than

two lanes wide. At the edges of the village they leave open space."

■ "With two working spouses, [smaller lots] make a lot more sense. You don't want to know that big lawn."

■ "People have a fundamental, psychological, spiritual response to nature. If you show them recently built multi-family housing or office parks, they go negative. A small, traditional neighborhood is what people want. They don't know how to get it."

Well, of course they don't: most of them haven't even seen a "small, traditional neighborhood" in years, if ever. But they instinctively choose it anyway. The premise of the new urbanism is that people can leave the kinds of neighborhoods they say they like. Architects know how to design them; developers can build them; banks can make money on them. All it takes is a measure of political will to overcome the inertia of 50 years of doing things the wrong way... and the application of a few simple rules.

46 NEWSWEEK MAY 15, 1995

GIVE UP BIG LAWNS

THE SUBURBAN WASN'T MEANT TO BE A SECURE place that grows lawns. "The great postwar disillusionment began for many Americans when they left the city in search of a simpler life and discovered that mowing, fertilizing, weeding and mowing the meadow took more time over a year than the average New Yorker spends looking for parking. And the expenses of front lawns themselves serve no purpose but their owners' vanity—except that most suburban communities require them, on the theory that large setbacks help preserve the bucolic character of a community."

That may have been true in the 1950s, when suburbs were being settled 50 houses at a time. But when highways opened up huge areas of countryside after the war, large-lot zoning had the opposite effect: by spreading population over a larger area, it accelerated sprawl. Housing boards weren't so fearful of density; they could require developers to cluster houses and set aside land nearby for open space and recreation. This is also a more efficient way to build a community. Houses that are 100 feet apart, for example, have 100 feet of unused road and utility lines between them. School buses have that much farther to travel.

And the goal of making a walkable community is debated when houses are spread out on huge lots. Even the depth of the front yard turns out to make a crucial psychological difference. When houses are set back behind 50 feet of lawn, the streetscape becomes oppressively dividing; your perspective changes so slowly you don't feel you're reaching a destination. Probably no single change would improve the quality of suburban life as much as shrinking the size of lots—and it would actually make houses cheaper.

BRING BACK THE CORNER STORE

THE SUBURBAN CONVENTION, SAYS architect Peter Callicott, "is a landscape of absolute segregation... not just in terms of income, age or ethnicity but simple functional sense." This is so obvious that most people no longer see the absurdity of making a five-mile round trip for a loaf of bread. That is, as long as they have a car, for anyone not so blessed—children, the elderly or handicapped, people who can't afford a car for every member of the family—it's nuts.

Again, this is a function of good intentions undone by the explosion of suburbia. What, worked in a compact neighborhood in a city—a dry cleaner, a drugstore, a corner grocery—became grotesque when blown up a hundredfold and applied to whole regions. Shopping strips stretched for dozens of miles along the



This wide street in Temecula, Calif., is fine for cars but not for kids and other pedestrians.

MAKE THE STREETS SKINNY

Modern subdivisions are designed to be driven, not walked. Even little-used streets are 36 feet or 40 feet wide, with big sweeping curves at the corners. It's great for cars: traffic barely needs to slow down. But for those on foot, the distance is daunting. Narrow streets—as little as 28 feet wide—and tight, right-angled corners are a lot easier for walkers, and probably safer as well, because they force drivers to slow down. One objection: fire departments worry about getting trucks through. But that hasn't been a big problem in old nubes in cities like New York and Boston.

highways, while the curving streets of suburbs wormed their way even closer into the countryside.

Obviously, malls and supermarkets, with their vast selections and economies of scale, will never be supplanted by neighborhood shopping streets and corner groceries. But it still should be possible to provide some of the conveniences of life within walking distance of many people. Then you could send your kid out for that bread—and a newspaper while he's at it.

MAY 15, 1995 NEWSWEEK 47

Mainstream national press advocating for
“Smart Development”

Built examples nationally



Kentlands



Celebration

Oregon examples



Oregon examples



Salem



Portland

Benefits of narrow streets

- Neighborhood livability
- Reduce traffic speeds
- Efficient use of urban land
- Less costly to construct and maintain
- Less impervious surface -- less stormwater runoff
- Less heat build up
- Sized to meet actual traffic needs



What does the TPR say?

Requirement

“...shall establish standards for local streets and accessways that minimize pavement width and total right-of-way consistent with the operational needs of the facility.”

Intent

“...consider and reduce excessive standards for local streets and accessways in order to reduce the cost of construction, provide for more efficient use of urban land, provide for emergency vehicle access while discouraging inappropriate traffic volumes and speeds, and which accommodate convenient pedestrian and bicycle circulation.”

II. Experience and Issues



Examples from Oregon's Communities

Ashland

Bandon (pop. 2,500)

Beaverton

Coburg (pop. 800)

Corvallis

Eugene

Forest Grove (pop. 15,000)

Gresham

Happy Valley (pop. 2,500)

Hood River (pop. 5,000)

McMinnville

Milton-Freewater (pop. 6,000)

Redmond (pop. 11,000)

Washington County

Recent built examples from Oregon



Recent built examples from Oregon



Top 5 Concerns About Narrow Local Streets

5. Big city solution to small town...



Which streets are from small towns?



Which streets are from small towns?

Top 5 Concerns About Narrow Local Streets

5. Big city solution to small town
4. Farm equipment
3. Recreational vehicles
2. Emergency vehicle access and response times
1. We like our streets the way they are!

DLCD Technical Assistance Efforts

- Skinny Streets brochure (1995)
- TGM Grants (ongoing)
- DLCD staff technical assistance (ongoing)
- Model Development Code and User's Guide for Small Cities (1999)
- Neighborhood Street Design Guidelines (1998-2000)

Summary of Major Findings



Emergency vehicles should have room to access streets and set up equipment

Summary of Major Findings



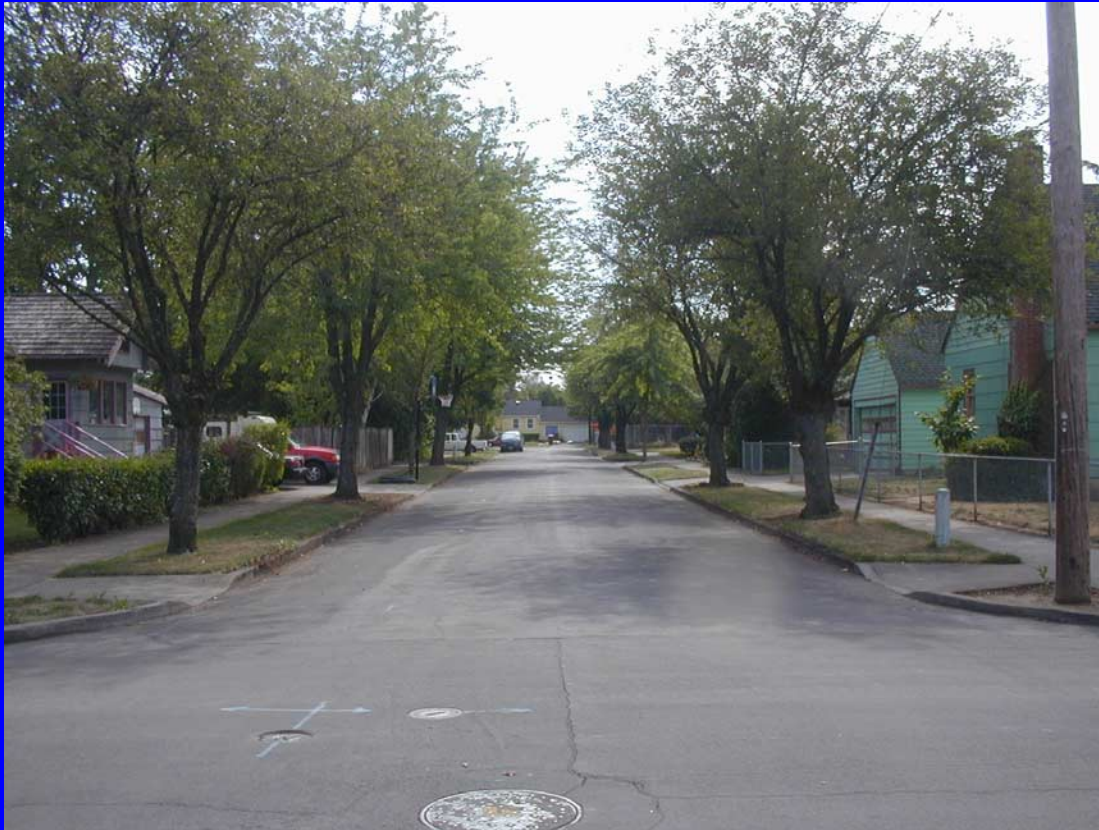
Density: wide streets are appropriate
in high-density neighborhoods

Summary of Major Findings



Gaps in on-street parking should
provide room for queuing

Summary of Major Findings



Narrow streets should be relatively short and connected

Neighborhood Street Design Guidelines



28-foot wide streets with parking on both sides...

Neighborhood Street Design Guidelines



...in low- and medium-density neighborhoods
with connected streets and adequate off-street parking...

Neighborhood Street Design Guidelines



...and where parking is prohibited at intersections.

Neighborhood Street Design Guidelines



24-foot wide streets with parking on one side and similar neighborhood characteristics.

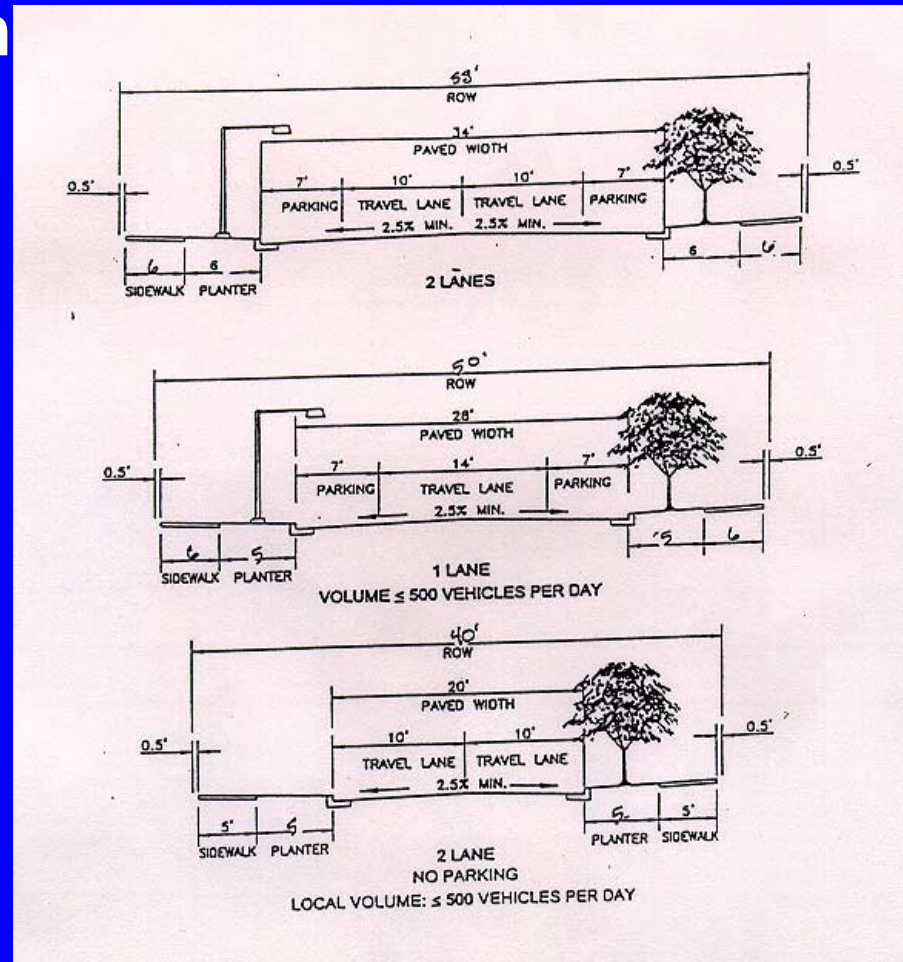
Neighborhood Street Design Guidelines



20-foot wide streets with no on-street parking in less dense neighborhoods.

III. TPR Interpretation

One size does not fit all...the design of local streets should vary according to function



Source: Hood River TSP, 1999

III. TPR Interpretation



32'-36- wide streets are appropriate for:

- High-density neighborhoods

- High-volume "subcollector" streets

- Evacuation routes

- Farm equipment access roads

III. TPR Interpretation



When applied as a uniform standard to all local streets, 32'-36' wide streets are too wide

III. TPR Interpretation



28' wide streets are a safe harbor
(Hood River, Corvallis)

III. TPR Interpretation

Other acceptable solutions:

32' wide streets with curb extensions
(Bend)

28' wide streets with parking on one
side (Albany, Phoenix)

20-28' wide streets with parking bays
(Jacksonville)

Case Studies



TSP's not yet
acknowledged . . .

Sublimity

Harrisburg

Douglas County
(Green UUA)
(unincorporated urban
area)

Sublimity



34' wide local streets

Sublimity



34' wide local streets

Harrisburg



36' wide local streets

Harrisburg



36' wide local streets

Douglas County - Green Urban Unincorporated Area

- Located between Roseburg and Winston
- Population 5,800
- SF and MF residential
- Average Lot Size 10,000 SF (4 du/acre)
- Urban water and sewer services
- Two elementary schools
- Commercial services
- Transit service

Douglas County - Green UUA



36' wide local streets
34' wide cul-de-sacs

Douglas County - Green UUA



36' wide local streets
34' wide cul-de-sacs

What guidance has DLCD given local governments?

- Local planning analysis should explain what they can (or cannot) do and why
- Adopt variety of local streets
- Adopt 28' "safe harbor"
- Don't apply "one size fits all" standard