

**CITY OF MASON
COUNCIL MEETING
MARCH 18, 2002**

The meeting was held at 6:00 p.m. at the Mason High School Commons. Mayor McCurley called the meeting to order at 6:07 p.m.

ATTENDANCE

The following members of Council were present: Jim Fox, Dick Staten, Victor Kidd, Tom Grossmann, Peter Beck, Charlene Pelfrey and John McCurley.

DOWNTOWN TRAFFIC

Mayor McCurley welcomed the public attending this meeting. He stated the City relies on planning for control and growth issues. He said tonight Council is here to listen to the public and learn. He introduced City Manager, Scot Lahrmer who stated the City Law Director has advised Councilmember Victor Kidd to refrain from commenting on this matter as he is a downtown business owner and therefore is affected by a conflict of interest. Scot gave a brief history of the City's attention to the downtown traffic congestion issue dating back to October 2000 when Ordinance 2000-152 was passed authorizing TEC to conduct a study evaluating the current situation. He stated this study was performed in May of 2001. In June of 2001, Mason-Montgomery Road was closed for the road improvement. The City was notified they had received a grant from the State for the widening of U.S. RT 42 from Tylersville to Fifth Avenue. He explained no action was taken immediately as the City wished to consider the downtown traffic situation. Mr. Ali Saleh, President of TEC Engineering addressed the group and gave a presentation that had previously been given to Councilmembers during two worksessions. This presentation explained how the traffic study was performed, the results of the study and how various options or alternatives were created to improve the situation. The alternatives were explained in detail giving both advantages and disadvantages of each one.

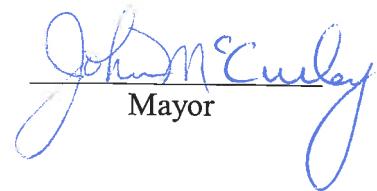
At the conclusion of this presentation, Mayor McCurley introduced Jack Flaherty who was representing a group of concerned citizens. Twelve people serving on this committee addressed Council. They are as follows: Russ Hutchins of 962 Locust Court, Steve Newell of 218 Reading Road, Linda Fitzgerald representing Downtown Mason Revitalization Committee, Dick Yost of 120 W. Main Street, Sally Nally of 319 Kings Mill Road, Bob Sloan of 414 Reading Road, David Batsche of 300 W. Main Street, Chester Mastalerz of 5078 Carter Court, Lee Hamilton of 826 Indianwood Drive, Phil Dubois of 4900 Laurel Wood Court and John Harris of 316 W. Main Street and Jack Flaherty of 104 Reading Road. Each speaker gave brief portions of the overall presentation and then gave Councilmembers a printed copy of the information. (See Attached) The committee also distributed a copy of questions they requested answered in writing.

Mayor McCurley thanked everyone for his or her input. He stated Council welcomes comments and suggestions and input for the people they are elected to serve. He stated their questions would be answered.

ADJOURN

A motion to adjourn was made by Councilmember Pelfrey, seconded by Councilmember Staten. VOTE: ALL YEAS
TIME: 8:00 p.m.


Clerk of Council


Mayor

Concerned Citizens
Presentation to Mason City Council
March 18, 2002

I. **Opening Remarks - Introductions**

- A. We are here to present our concerns about the apparent intention of City Council to develop a "**Major Thoroughfare**" through the historic neighborhoods and town center of Mason as evidenced by Council's plan to employ a civil engineer to design the widening of Route 42 from Tylersville Road north to Fifth Street.
- B. We also want to present **guiding principles** that we feel should be considered before any work is commenced on this proposed "**Major Thoroughfare.**"
- C. After presenting these concerns and guiding principles, we wish to present a **list of questions** which we feel should be answered and/or responded to (in writing) before this proposed "**Major Thoroughfare**" is pursued.
- D. Finally, we wish to present a **recommended course of action.**

II. **Concerns**

- A. Our first concern is that there appears to be an intention on the part of City Council to pursue the development of a "**Major Thoroughfare**" through the historic center of our community before all options have been thoroughly studied for **diverting** traffic from the historic core as a part of a comprehensive plan for Mason. Such a comprehensive plan should (among other things) do the following:
 - 1. Establish a long range plan for **diverting through traffic and/or regional traffic** from the historic core of Mason by creating an updated regional thoroughfare system (which among other things) rescinds the designated "**Major Thoroughfare**" through the core of Mason. (Rather than ask, "**How can we funnel more traffic through the historic core of Mason?**", we should be asking, "**How can we divert regional traffic from the historic core of Mason?**")

2. Define a **historic district** which should be preserved and enhanced and be off limits to the incursion of a "**Major Thoroughfare**" or other development adverse to preserving the historic character of Mason. (See Map from DMRC notebook defining the historic core.)
 3. Provide a **master plan** for future development of the entire city which conforms to the best current thinking on city and neighborhood planning principles.
 4. There appears to be no "**emergency**" or other **legitimate circumstance** which would justify the creation of a "**Major Thoroughfare**" through the historic core of Mason at this time.
 - a) There has actually been a dramatic reduction in Route 42 traffic through the historic core of Mason with the completion of the Tylersville and Mason-Montgomery Road projects.
 - b) There could be a further reduction in local traffic when the city moves its offices out of downtown.
- B. Our second concern is that the plan to develop a "**Major Thoroughfare**" through the historic core of Mason is in direct conflict with the recommendations and goals set forth by two city formed study committees. Both the **Comprehensive Plan Update Committee** (which published its report in August 2001) and the **Downtown Mason Revitalization Committee** came to similar conclusions about how to preserve and enhance the historic core of Mason. Both committees recognized that a high priority should be placed on:
1. **Preserving the historic character of Mason.**
Downtown is one of the few remaining parts of the community that generates a "small town" atmosphere.
(From Comprehensive Plan Update published August 2001)
 2. **Improving pedestrian access to and pedestrian circulation through the downtown district.**

3. Improving parking in the downtown area.

- C. We have asked a spokesperson from each committee to briefly describe the extensive work they did and speak to their concern about the proposed thoroughfare.
1. Downtown Mason Revitalization Committee
 2. Comprehensive Plan Update Committee

III. Guiding Principles

- A. We believe that before major improvements or changes to the fabric of the city are proposed, there should first be **broad consensus** on the goals and/or **guiding principles** for development of the city against which the proposed development or "improvement" can be measured. Both the **Comprehensive Plan Update Committee** and the **Downtown Mason Revitalization Committee** established similar guiding principles which should be thoroughly understood and considered before any form of thoroughfare through the historic core is pursued.
- B. Each committee embraced many of the goals of the "New Urbanism" movement. (Some would prefer the term "traditional town planning movement.")

New Urbanism Guiding Principles of Town Design

New Urbanists promote a return to the **traditional town planning** that defines places like downtown Charleston, S.C., old town Alexandria, Va., historic Georgetown in Washington, and we might add, the **historic core of Mason**. (See www.pbs.org/newshour/newurbanism web site. Also see www.cnu.org)

Core principles of New Urbanism Include:

- **Walkability:** Basic goods and services are available within a five minute walk. Sidewalks, narrow streets, and proximity of commercial and residential areas facilitate walking.

Street design places a higher value on the pedestrian than the car. In order to walk from home to town, "the walk is not across two enormous parking lots and a six-lane road, it's around the corner, along a wide sidewalk along a narrow street where parked cars protect you as a pedestrian." Intersections are squared off to facilitate safe pedestrian crossing. Ask, "does your street design pass the lollipop test?" Can a kid safely walk from home to town to buy a lollipop? Can elderly persons who do not wish to drive, safely walk to a shopping district or town center?

- **De-emphasis of the Car:** Garages are hidden in alleys out of sight. Parallel street parking replaces the parking lot.
- **Mixed Use:** Typical suburbs put homes in one area, schools in another and shopping in yet a third. New Urbanists mix building types, sizes and prices. A modest townhouse or duplex cozies up to a large single family home, which may have a rental apartment over its garage. Apartments are built over street level stores.
- **Community:** New Urbanist design encourages human interaction by keeping houses close to each other and close to the street. Residents gather on front porches, in nearby parks and on open plazas. Neighbors share driveways, walkways and alleys.

C. **Conflicting Purposes:** When we look at the concept of a "**Major Thoroughfare**" through the historic core of Mason, we see a concept that is in conflict with the **guiding principles** both study committees embraced and the tenets of the most current thinking in town planning.

1. We already have a preview of one of the problems associated with a "**Major Thoroughfare**" through the historic core, namely the pedestrian unfriendly nature of "**thoroughfares.**" The sweeping turns now under construction at the intersection of Mason Montgomery Road and Main Street are in conflict with the goal of pedestrian friendly walkways embraced by

each committee and professionals in the field of town planning. Their design encourages motorists to round the intersection at higher speeds, making them hazardous to pedestrians crossing the intersection. **They fail the "lollipop test."**

2. A **"Major Thoroughfare"** by its very nature promotes higher volumes of traffic at higher speeds rather than diminished traffic at slower speeds.
3. A **"Major Thoroughfare"** is typically incompatible with and does not provide for "on-street" parking. Thus, the goal of providing more parking in the historic core and downtown of Mason would be negated and with it the viability of the downtown business district.
4. A **"Major Thoroughfare"** running immediately adjacent to pedestrian walkways is inherently hazardous to pedestrians. There would typically be no parked car buffer between traffic and pedestrians. A major portion of Main Street currently exhibits this problem. This problem should be corrected, not made worse.
5. We would encourage you to study the example of two nearby cities.
 - a. **Rt. 741 through the historic core of Springboro demonstrates the value of following the "Traditional Town" guiding principles.** Springboro's historic core along Route 741 has seen a dramatic transformation as a result of following the guidelines we and the two study committees are advocating.
 - b. **Route 4 through Fairfield demonstrates what can happen when these guiding principles are ignored in the interest of simply funneling more traffic through a business district.**

"Route 4 is turning gray," warned Jack Hern, owner of

Hern Marine. "There are many, many vacancies and we're moving traffic out of the city when we want to be called the market center of Butler County."

From March 8, 2002 article in **The Cincinnati Enquirer**

IV Questions (We request that all answers be put in writing)

1. Why is the city pursuing a plan which is in conflict with the goals of the two committees which the city formed to develop a plan for Mason?
2. Why is a "**Major Thoroughfare**" being pursued to funnel more traffic through the historic core of Mason rather than pursuing a plan for diverting through traffic or regional traffic around the historic core of Mason. What is the status of the Snider Road Project and its eventual path? Why is there apparently no joint effort with Warren County and Deerfield Township officials to look at a regional traffic plan which would preserve the historic core of Mason?
3. What is driving the rush to start designing a "**Major Thoroughfare**" through the historic core of Mason?
4. Why has a signage plan not been devised to divert through traffic from the historic core of Mason using the new Tylersville and Mason Montgomery Roads as a by-pass until a better plan is developed? For instance, at the intersection of Tylersville and Route 42, why is there not a sign facing in-bound traffic which directs "**To North Route 42**" and points east on Tylersville Road and another sign which directs "**To Downtown Business District**" by pointing north on Reading Road?
5. Why was the Downtown Revitalization Planning Committee told to stop work?
6. What will be the economic and social impact of any "**Major Thoroughfare**" through the historic core of Mason? (Show Impact Study Board). What will be the economic cost to the city for the loss of small businesses along any proposed "**Major Thoroughfare**" in the historic district if their street or off-street parking is removed, or their building is removed. What will be the cost in reduced property values for any residences fronting on a proposed "**Major Thoroughfare**"? Will there

be a plan for relocating any business dislocated by the "**Major Thoroughfare**" plan? (We know of businesses looking at downtown Mason as a potential location but which are hesitant to commit knowing of the potential for a "**Major Thoroughfare**" being run through the business district .)

7. What will be the total construction cost of a "**Major Thoroughfare**" through the historic core of Mason including acquisition of property and right-of-ways? (We want to know what the total cost of any proposal is before any portion of the project is started.)
8. Which structures will disappear to accommodate the proposed "**Major Thoroughfare**?" What will replace them?
9. If parking is removed along the proposed "**Major Thoroughfare**", where will people park? What will be the cost of creating replacement parking?
10. Has a new traffic count been done since the opening of Mason Montgomery and Tylersville Roads?
11. What will be the traffic impact of the city offices moving out of downtown?

V Recommended Course of Action

- Cancel any further engineering of a "**Major Thoroughfare**" through the historic core of Mason.

Then:

1. Install directional signs at the intersection of Tylersville & Reading Roads and Main Street & Mason Montgomery Road directing traffic "To North Route 42" and "To South Route 42" respectively along with signs directing to "Downtown Business District." At these two intersections, adjust the traffic signals to facilitate taking the Tylersville/Mason-Montgomery bypass. Extend the turn lanes at these two signals. Remove current signage directing traffic through town to destinations such as Kings Island, The Beach, or I-71 and install new signage diverting traffic to those destinations from the historic core.

2. After these improvements have been in place for at least ninety days, employ an independent engineering firm to conduct a new traffic count of that portion of Route 42 in the historic core.

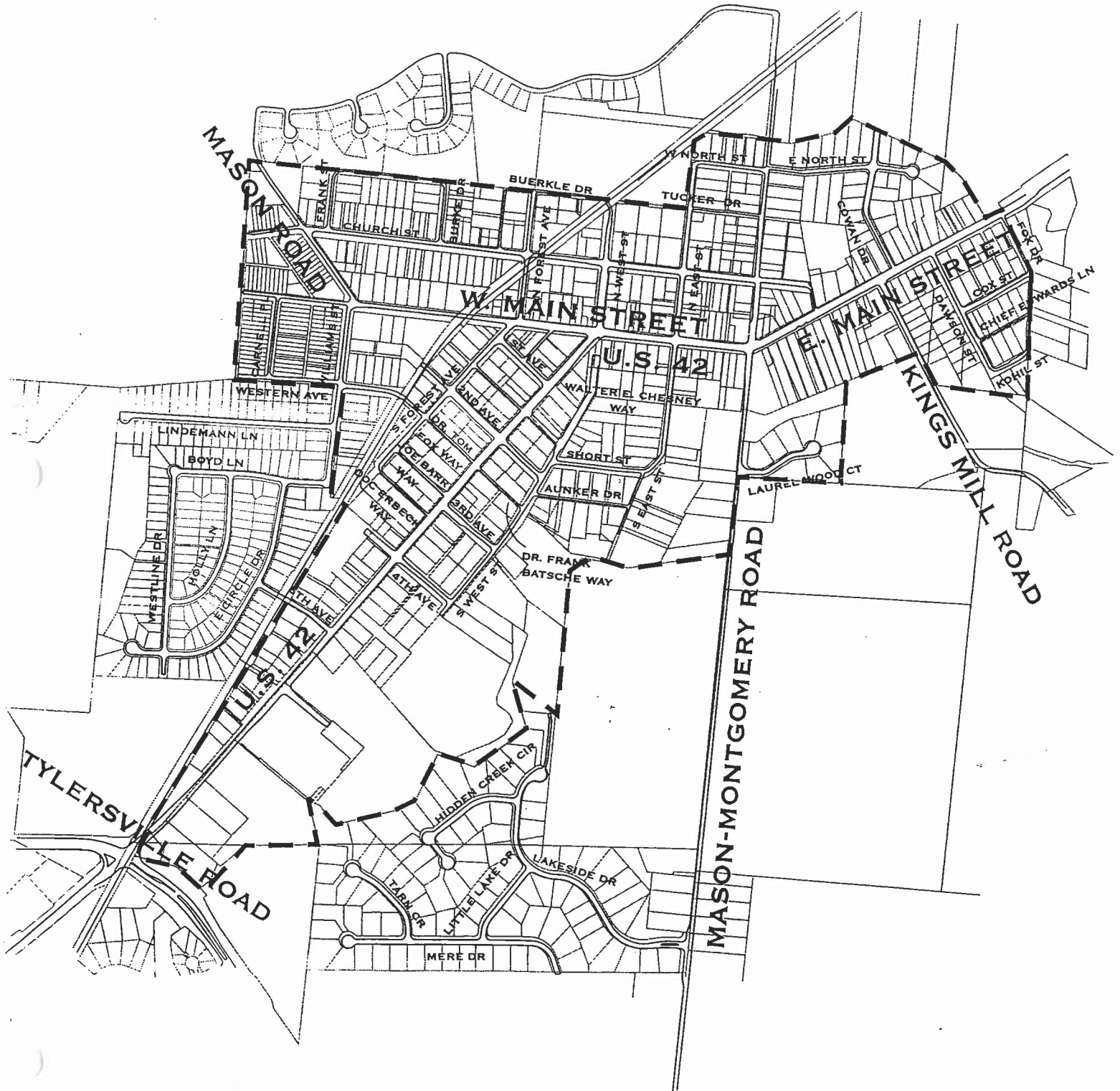
3. Meanwhile, establish a "**Joint Taskforce**" made up of the following groups (in no particular order):
 - a. **The Comprehensive Plan Update Committee** and their professional advisors.
 - b. **The Downtown Mason Revitalization Committee** and their professional advisors.
 - c. **The City Manager and City Engineer.**
 - d. **The City Planning Commission and City Planner**
 - e. **City Council**
 - f. A duly constituted "**Downtown Merchants' & Residents' Association.**"
 - g. **Officials from Deerfield Township, Warren and Butler Counties as needed.**
 - h. **Additional interested citizens.**

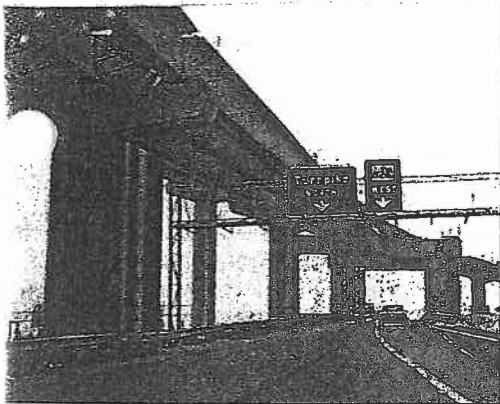
4. Charge the **Joint Task Force** to do the following:
 - a. Serve as an advisory committee to review and coordinate all planning actions undertaken by the city and its various boards and assist City Council in acquiring community consensus on implementation of any planning proposals.
 - b. Develop the guiding principles that will be used to judge any further development or improvements to the City of Mason.

- c. Present said guiding principles for comment at one or more community forums.
 - d. Forward the approved guiding principles to City Council for formal adoption.
 - e. Develop a regional thoroughfare system or plan which diverts through traffic or regional traffic from the historic core of Mason.
 - f. Review and comment on any future thoroughfare proposal or major development proposal which would impact the historic core of Mason.
5. Empower the Downtown Mason Revitalization Committee to resume and then complete their work. Have them report back to the Joint Taskforce as soon as possible.
 6. Implement the recommendations of the Joint Taskforce.

VI Closing Remarks

TENTATIVE DOWNTOWN BOUNDARY





Superhighways are relegated to the far outskirts of town by new urbanists, who claim that expressways have done more harm than good.

thorpe Associates promotes urban growth boundaries and future development around regional transit. But localities are afraid they will lose control, so most states have not authorized regional governance, says Peter A. Calthorpe. The result is "fractured development, no regional transit and no attention to broader environmental and economic issues," he says.

There are many proposed new urbanism projects, but less than a dozen are built. Most, not yet five years old, have yet to reach build-out. The more well known are DPZ's Kentlands in Gaithersburg, Md.; architect-planner Calthorpe's Laguna West in Sacramento; architect Looney Hicks Kiss' Harbor Town in Memphis; and DPZ's Seaside, a northern Florida vacation-home town.

Retrofits are possible but more difficult. Subdivisions, with multiple landowners and streets that are nearly impossible to link, are the most troublesome. Office park and shopping center makeovers, such as Mashpee Commons on Cape Cod, are easier because the cost of a parking garage to free up surface lot space for development can often be financially justified, says Duany.

The optimal new urbanism unit is 160 acres. Typically, the developer provides the infrastructure. The town architect establishes and oversees the plan and designs some structures. But other architects are also involved. Public buildings and space, including a community green, are located near the center, as are many commercial buildings.

Mix. Under new urbanism, there is often no minimum building setback. Lot widths are typically multiples of 16 ft, and are 100 ft deep. There are a variety of residential buildings—apartment buildings, row houses and detached houses—usually mixed with businesses. Finally, there are alleys lined by garages and secondary buildings, such as carriage houses and studios.

All elements are planned around "the distance the average person will walk before thinking about getting in the car," says Michael D. Watkins, Kent-

lands' town architect in DPZ's Gaithersburg office. That's a maximum five-minute walk—a quarter mile or 1,350 ft—from a town center to its edges.

New urbanists maintain that a family will need fewer cars. Duany likes to point out that it costs an average of \$5,500 per year to support each car, the equivalent of the annual payment on a \$55,000 mortgage.

Sidewalks are usually 5 ft wide instead of four. Streets, designed to entice not intimidate walkers, are typically laid out in a hierarchical, modified grid pattern. The broadest are 36 ft wide; the narrowest, 20 ft. On-street parking is encouraged and counted toward minimum requirements. Vehicle speed is 15-20

mph, not 25-30 mph. Curb return radii are minimized so that pedestrian crossing is not daunting. Superhighways are relegated to the far outskirts of town.

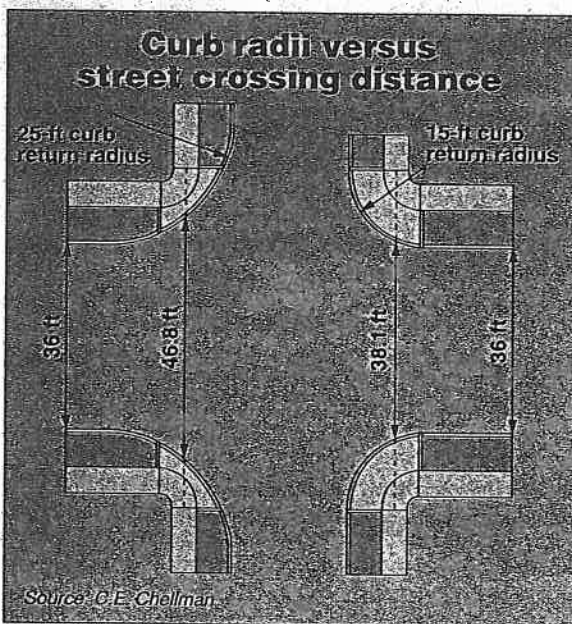
In a grid, traffic is designed to move more slowly but it is also more evenly distributed so there are fewer and shorter-duration jams, says Duany. In the typical suburb, broad commercial streets, called collectors, have become wall-to-wall traffic, while loop and cul-de-sac asphalt typically remains underused.

Berkus objects to the grid, except to organize the town center. The "edges should be organic" for those who perceive "enclaves" as safer and more secure places to live, he says.

Bernardo Fort-Brescia, principal of Miami-based Arquitectonica, also thinks the undulating street and cul-de-sac should be offered. "There are no absolutes," he says.

The firm's plan for Meerhoven, a new town proposed for Holland, reflects many new urbanist concepts in a modern vernacular. "Nothing is faked to appear old," says Fort-Brescia. Every element has a function based on modern lifestyles. For example, the town lake is sized for triathlon swimming and perimeter marathon runs. But pedestrians and bikers are encouraged. And mass transit will whisk commuters to jobs elsewhere.

Arquitectonica is fortu-



Street Design	Standard	New Urbanism
Basic layout	Dendritic	Interconnected grid
Alleys	Often discouraged	Encouraged
Design speed	Typically 25-30 mph	Typically 20 mph
Street width	Generally wider	Generally narrower
Curb radii	Selected to ensure in-lane turning	Selected for pedestrian times and vehicle
Intersection geometry	Designed for efficiency, safety, vehicular speed	Designed to discourage through traffic for safety
Trees, landscaping	Strictly controlled	Encouraged
Streetlights	Fewer, tall, efficient luminaires	More, shorter, closely spaced lanterns
Sidewalks	4-ft minimum width, outside right of way or to undulate	5-ft minimum, with parallel to street
Building setbacks	15 ft or more	No minimum
Parking	Off-street preferred	On-street encouraged
Trip generation	Developed from a sum of the users	Developed from a need for vehicular

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