NEW URBANISM AND DIVERSE COMMUNITIES:

AN ANALYSIS OF KYLE, TEXAS

HONORS THESIS

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by

Andrea Z. Villalobos

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Thesis Supervisor:

_____

James Vaughan, Ph.D.
Honors College

Approved:

_____

Heather C. Galloway, Ph.D.
Dean, Honors College

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Andrea Zepeda Villalobos

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THESIS SUPERVISOR: JAMES VAUGHAN

The purpose of this study is to determine the level of diversity created in a New Urbanist neighborhood compared to a standard suburban sprawl neighborhood in the bedroom community of Kyle, Texas. The goal is to define how diversity can be fostered or suppressed at both the micro-level in terms of community form, and at the macro-level in terms of resident interaction within the city as a whole. Rapid population growth challenges Kyle's ability to create unique and diverse places for residents. Kyle's New Urbanist community, Plum Creek, is creating a new design for urban planning in the region, but can it truly achieve the level of diversity outlined in the Charter of New Urbanism? This research examines the successes and failures of two neighborhood's ability to intertwine everyday lifestyles, work, recreation and diversity into a meaningful

community. Furthermore, it emphasizes that measures of diversity are strongly dependent

upon the larger spatial scope of the urban context.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Cities are where we live, shop, work, and shape our everyday experiences. Our interactions within cities help us assess our personal quality of life and create our sense of place. Cities also have a unique identity based on what qualities the city offers. Identity includes the thoughts and feelings we associate with the city and why we choose to live there. Throughout urban planning history various attempts have been made to structure and design the built environment in order to create a unique place for inhabitants.

At the start of the twentieth century, cities were close-knit, with dense urban centers where people lived near their employment, and development was geographically placed around the center, or central business district (CBD). As increased crowding, pollution, and disease began to engulf cities, there was a growing desire to escape to healthier edges of cities and into new areas of suburban housing. As the automobile emerged, suburban growth flourished and the old inner city became an area of abandonment, crime, and low-income housing. Additionally, this sprawling growth in population required increased infrastructure such as roads, parks, clean water, waste management, and utilities that all put pressure on the environment. Pollution from fossil fuels, deforestation for development, and the draining of wetlands are some of the detrimental effects of sprawling development.

Sprawling growth has also contributed to concentrations of poverty and wealth in distinct areas. This process is detrimental to the diversity of economic opportunities such as jobs and access to services increasing racial segregation (Squires 2002). In order to manage the environment, nurture cultural and economic diversity, and preserve the quality of life for all residents, it is imperative that we adopt sustainable planning techniques.

Recently, a neo-traditional technique known as New Urbanism has emerged that builds on the traditional planning of cities prior to suburban development and creates a new approach for today's era of planning. Neo-traditional planning is characterized by higher densities, mixed uses, public transit, the accommodation of pedestrians and bicyclists, and a more interconnected pattern of streets (Southworth 1997). It examines the early twentieth century American city in order to create a similar design. Proponents believe that New Urbanism can alleviate sprawl and placelessness, and create housing and cultural diversity by re-implementing past methods of design that had once created high densities, and human-centered environments (Foreman 2009). New Urbanism revolves around four principles: diversity, human-scale, conservation, and regionalism (Calthorpe 1994). There is much debate as to whether the identity of New Urbanism is a lofty set of utopian principles, or a retro style that lacks the structure for widespread implementation, or perhaps in fact both (Calthorpe 1994). Regardless, in what ways can New Urbanist principles be applied at the local scale? And to what extent can these practices promote diversity in Kyle's setting of sprawling growth?

As we incorporate sustainability into the analysis for planning cities, it is important to understand all aspects of the term: environmental, economic, and social. While urban sustainability does include common individual activities such as community gardens, recycling, composting, or sidewalks, bike lanes, and parks, there are more macro-level socio-economic structures to consider. Is a development project inclusive or exclusive? Is it accessible or is it gated away? These types of questions address social equity within sustainability and make up the *diversity* principle in New Urbanism. Diversity has another more direct meaning: diverse uses, a rich mix of activities as well as people (Calthorpe 1994). The diversity in people and use creates a city's identity or sense of place. The city can help people live happy and productive lives, while those people also mold the city in their image. This is perhaps a chicken and egg scenario, or what geographers refer to as *sociospatial dialectic.* This continuous two-way process is where people "create and modify urban spaces while at the same time being conditioned in various ways by the spaces in which they live and work" (Knox and Pinch 2000, 8). Diversity in people and use creates a collaborative identity where both people and city connect.

City and community identity becomes a key indicator for sustainability in the study area of Kyle. Like most other cities within the Central Texas corridor, Kyle is split in half by the Balcones Escarpment and Interstate 35. East of I-35 are fertile coastal plains that then give way to the rolling Texas Hill Country in the west. Similarly, there is also a separation of low-income and high-income property that is physically marked by both a natural landform and a major highway. This distinct separation threatens the city's cohesive diversity and identity. Cohesive diversity, a combination of micro and macro

diversity, is important for connecting all residents within the city by further creating a community that all residents can interact in together. Identity is also the foundational image of how Kyle is perceived by people in the area. What attracts people to Kyle to live, shop, work, or visit? As we consider existing New Urbanism projects in Kyle such as Plum Creek, we must consider to what extent development projects are inclusive or exclusive. This analysis can provide a greater understanding for the effectiveness of implementing local New Urbanism techniques and their ability to create diverse communities.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sustainability: An Evolving Term

The term *sustainability* has evolved into a broad and ambiguous term that characterizes social, economic, and environmental impacts into societal decision-making (Farley and Smith 2013). While some authors argue that the ambiguity of the term is in itself the strength of the movement's broad participation of actors and conversations, it is also argued that it's multiple meanings allows it to mean "everything to everyone" (Farley and Smith 2013). There is no universally accepted definition for sustainability, but only meanings molded by actors and interests. The 1987 Brundtland Commission's report defined sustainable development as "development which meets the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (UNECE 2014, 1). This definition creates a framework for defining sustainability, but the aim at pursuing a "better life" can be interpreted by some as overconsumption, exploitation, and social inequity without addressing a limit to growth socially, economically, and environmentally.

Other definitions such as the *Nested Model* of sustainability offer dependent social, economic, and environmental variables that overlap within each other to form sustainability that is dependent upon the survival of all variables (Farley and Smith, 2013). The environment serves as the foundation of the model and the realms of social

and economic variables exist within. In this sense, the limits to growth are recognized so that issues like environmental preservation, economic development, and social equity and diversity can be incorporated into planning. In other words, if an action appears to improve the quality of an economic system through building a large strip mall, but damages the community's equitability by placing it near a single-family residential center, then it cannot be characterized as sustainable. This Nested Model is an effective way to distinguish holistic sustainability from faux-sustainability that although benefiting one system, may hurt another.

Sustainable development has become a global concern, and although international consensus suggests *something* should be done, it is not quite clear *what* should be done or how to do it. Nations across the world have engaged in the sustainability conversation through UN Summits but fail to implement a common process for change. Sustainable practices have instead been subject to convenience or dependent upon the comfort zone of in-place government practices and leaders. The United States has yet to sign any international agreement to reduce its carbon footprint. Moreover, the absence of this national leadership or substantial global cooperation suggests tackling sustainability opportunities on a more local or decentralized political scale.

Cities and Urbanization

The world is becoming increasingly urban. In 2010, 50.5% of the world's population (3.5 billion people) are living in urban areas (United Nations). This same growth is seen in the U.S. with 80.7% of the population living in urban areas (U.S. Census 2010). According to the Census Bureau, a place is 'urban' if it is a big, modest, or even very small collection of people living near each other, whether it holds a population

count of 50,000 or 2,500 (U.S. Census 2010). Kyle remained rural since its founding in

1881 and did not reach urban status until 1994 when the population reached 2,500.

Today, Kyle hovers at a population of 30,800 and is expected to surpass 60,000 by 2020

(U.S. Census). The city has experienced astounding population growth and will continue

to urbanize. As urban areas continue to offer economic opportunities, populations will

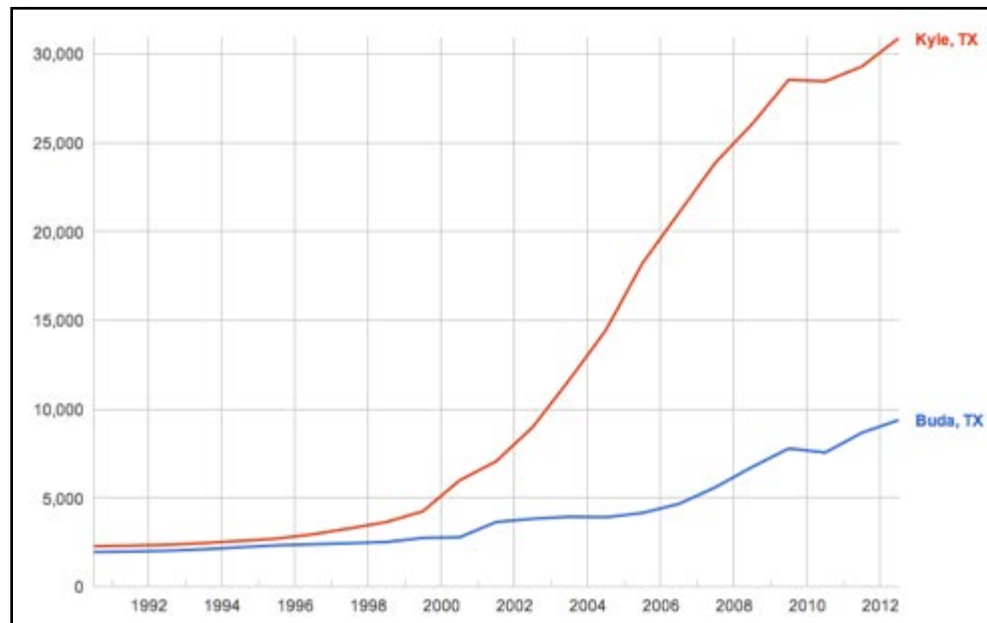continue to migrate towards the bright lights of the city.

Figure 1. Kyle, TX Population Growth compared to Buda, TX. Map arranged by
Google Public Data, adapted from U.S. Census Bureau Data, 2012.

Cities like Kyle are feeling this growth directly. Figure 1 shows Kyle's population

growth compared to the adjacent city of Buda. Pursuing sustainability at the local level

within cities is ideal because it allows community engagement with a diverse group of

residents, ideas, and goals. The pressures of urbanization are increasingly pronounced as

individuals experience the expansion of their communities and cities. Residents are

seeking livable, quality, affordable, sustainable communities and demanding more

residential, transportation, education, and work options for their families (Katz and

Bradly 2013). Residents of cities reach out towards local leaders and entities within their cities to address quality of life in the form of public participation and opinion. This includes community health, historic preservation, expanding transportation, or core services like safe streets and good schools. Citizens experience these services directly and on a daily basis and are given an opportunity for diverse community participation.

As we search for an effective way to manage global sustainability and the environmental, social, and economic forces that come with it, cities are proving to become a global innovator for change. Cities aggregate people and places in a geography that are large enough to make a difference but small enough to impart a diverse sense of community and common purpose (Katz and Bradly 2013). Cities and metropolitan areas are action-oriented by continuously providing services, growing development, building homes, and developing community. They are capable of innovating locally while working globally making them a powerful planning entity.
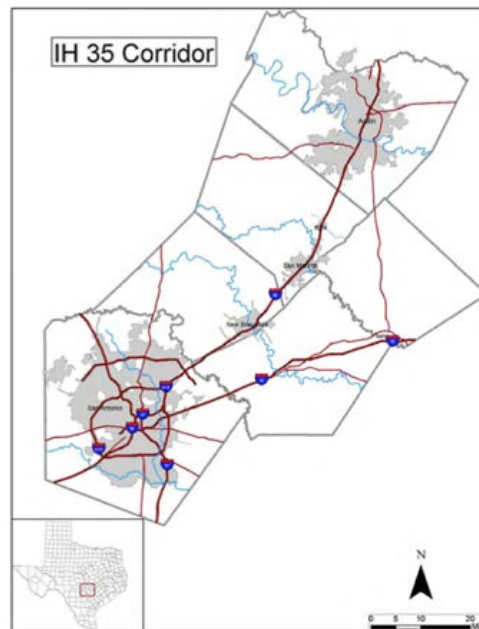

Figure 2. IH 35 Regional Corridor
Map by John Vernon Foreman. (Texas Natural Resources Information System 2008).

Regional Growth: IH 35 Corridor

Kyle is located in the IH 35 Corridor that connects Austin to San Antonio (Figure 2). The population growth in this region picked up in the post-World War II era. San Antonio's growth was partly related to a large presence of military bases and white-collar services; Austin, traditionally home to the state government and one of Texas' large flagship universities branched out into the high tech sector in the 1970s and 1980s (Day and Vaughan 2011). Today, the Austin-San Antonio Corridor is one of the fastest growing regions in the United States. It is currently home to over 4 million people and is expected to grow to 6-7 million people by 2030 (Corridor 2014). Interstate 35 is the third most congested spot for trucks anywhere on the US Interstate System (Corridor 2014). Consequently, severe traffic problems and wrecks disrupt the fluidity of transport for those living in the Corridor.

Kyle and other cities along the corridor have developed infrastructure for the automobiles that move through the Corridor. The commercial tax base is dependent on quick-stop automobile destinations such as gas stations or fast food chains in order to cater to the stop-and-go commuter. *Super Regional Nodes* form that consist of big-box retail allowing the everyday commuter to grab all their services and needs in one large shopping center. Kyle's Super Regional Node contains large-scale, institutional, commercial, and retail land uses with the Seton Medical Center as the key distinguishing feature (Kyle Comp Plan). This shopping node also includes the new Austin Community College campus, is home to the majority of Kyle's retail offerings, includes the city's only grocery store, and the hospital. This new thriving business district-shopping node, however, is actually 2.3 miles north of Kyle's historic downtown and Central Business

District (CBD). While this Super Regional Node of development along the Interstate is important for Kyle's growth, it is equally significant to bring diverse development to the city's historic inner core or near other neighborhoods that could benefit from mixed-use development at other nodes within the city. Diversified development for all residents within the local community can expand Kyle's identity and promote the creation of regional connection and competition amidst a corridor of cities with multiplying super regional shopping nodes. If Kyle does not offer a unique range of jobs and services, it will not stand out from other cities within the corridor and its commuting population will shop and work elsewhere.

With nearby Austin positioned just 15 miles north of Kyle, residents of this growing community commute up and down the corridor for work. Austin has a reputation for job-creation within the high-tech and state government sectors. Economist Richard Florida has described Austin as a "cluster city" of creative-sector jobs where specialized industry has come together to create a strong economic base that is accented by quality of life services (Florida 2008). The Austin job force is expanding outside the city limits and has become further connected to suburban communities like Kyle. Although residents of Kyle may connect to Austin through economic and social participation, the aim of creating Kyle's unique character is to provide a diverse range of services and uses that caters to Kyle itself.

Kyle's strategic location just 15 miles south of Austin and 57 miles north of San Antonio allows for a suburban community of mass production homes and gated subdivisions just outside the periphery of Austin's large urban border. Kyle was recently named the #2 place in Texas for homeownership. Kyle boasts an 81% homeownership

rate and monthly homeownership costs that only take up 23% of median household income creating an affordable destination for families (Clark 2014). State housing incentives coupled with an ideal location along the corridor have allowed Kyle to become a leading destination for new families. Furthermore, economic development demands have become a top priority to complement this growth testing Kyle's ability to hold on to its community character and implement sustainable planning practices. While Kyle's New Urbanist neighborhood, Plum Creek, certainly contrasts the city's stereotypical suburban landscape, increasing big-box commercial retail threaten the city's ability to promote diverse uses.

Sustainability and Diversity

Diversity encompasses the "social" variable within the Nested Model of sustainability. The term has several meanings: a varied physical design, mixes of uses, an expanded public realm, and multiple social groupings exercising their "right to the city" (Fainstein 2005). Among urban designers *diversity* refers to mixing building types; among planners it means a desirable mix of people with differing demographic, economic, and ethnic characteristics that together create a balanced or complete community (Cole and Goodchild 2000). Communities should be for everybody. Planners attempt to fuel this diversity by planning something for everybody such as schools, parks, coffee shops, medical facilities, and furthermore, planning transportation access to these services.

Jane Jacobs, renowned urban studies author and strong advocate of diversity within cities, states that multiple uses can promote economic and social diversity:

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> One principle emerges . . . ubiquitously, and in so many and such complex
> different forms [that] . . . it becomes the heart of my argument. This ubiquitous
> principle is the need of cities for a most intricate and close-grained diversity of
> uses that give each other constant mutual support, both economically and socially.
> The components of this diversity can differ enormously, but they must
> supplement each other in certain concrete ways. (Jacobs 1961, p. 14)

Jacobs points out four key items that are needed for a place to generate diversity in an urban district: mixed uses, short blocks, a mix of old and new buildings, and a dense concentration of people (Jacobs 1961). Poor housing standards and neglected areas of cities create significant problems for social equity and city diversity by concentrating the poor or specific ethnicities in certain areas of the city. Additionally, gated communities emerge for middle and upper income residents that create exclusionary housing and high-priced real estate and limit affordable housing. These phenomena create disparities between low income and upper income sides of town and can further create racial segregation. This perspective of diversity encompasses a macro look at diversity within cities. However, in what ways can diversity be created at the community level?

Community involves sharing in others' needs and interests through common consciousness and mutual understanding (Young 1990). In a community, multiple groups coexist side by side, maintaining their own identities, lifestyles, values, and so on (Day 2003). In a diverse community no single group dominates but rather multiple groups live together in a municipality that permits different voices to be heard (Day 2003). If a community's private spaces are reserved primarily for the well-off and its public spaces do not completely reflect the social and cultural differences of the community, can it really be diverse?

To address some of the challenges of creating diversity, many local governments have adopted policies for including those traditionally excluded. These policies include

affordable housing and integrated housing. Concepts within urban planning like sustainable development and smart growth are important because they have begun to provide a political foundation for a new generation of public policy. However, in order to truly be sustainable, the policies must consider equity. Thus, smart growth can mean gentrification, the displacement of low-moderate-income families in existing older neighborhoods, or public subsidies for transportation investments that further isolate low-income populations from regional opportunity (Bullard 1997). A place may contribute to place vitality and economic health, but studies have suggested that it is less clear that they can guarantee social diversity or sustainability (Grant and Perrott 2009). At the urban scale, cities may have an impressive mix of uses and considerable ethnic diversity. At the neighborhood scale, however, the social mix is less diverse than planners hope to see (Grant and Perrott 2009). Summarily, diversity must encompass both physical mix of uses and a social mix of income, ethnicities, and identities.

New Urbanism: Diverse Communities?

Neo-traditional designers look nostalgically back to the small American town as an alternative to conventional suburban development (Southworth 1997). Compared with conventional suburbs, New Urbanism developments, at least on the drawing board, are characterized by somewhat higher densities, mixed uses, provision of public transit, accommodation of the pedestrian and the bicyclist, and a more interconnected pattern of streets (Southworth 1997). Their designers assert that they are less auto-dependent and more conducive to forming a sense of community than are typical late-twentieth-century subdivisions. Nevertheless, it is unclear whether New Urbanism really creates diverse communities.

New Urbanists believe that diversity is fundamental to creating healthy, vibrant communities (Duany and Plater-Zyberk 1994; Moule and Polyzoides 1994; Calthorpe 1994). In a comment on gated communities, Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck (2000) point out that "the unity of society is threatened not by the use of gates but by the uniformity and exclusivity of the people behind them" (45). They also argued that "a child growing up in such a homogeneous environment is less likely to develop a sense of empathy for people from other walks of life" and that overly homogeneous places make anything "different" feel dangerous (45–46). New Urbanist developments should integrate various groups of people into a community as well as integrating mixed use (Cabrera and Najarian 2013).

Contrary to standard suburban design, which separates living space, working space, and shopping space, New Urbanism designs attempt to combine all these elements into a single area. As Todd Bressi (1994, xxi) notes, "near the commercial area would be a mix of small-lot single-family houses, duplexes, town- houses and apartments." This combination of assorted living and working spaces is designed to attract a diverse range of people and contributes to the development of a vibrant neighborhood. Ultimately, New Urbanists are hopeful that design features such as mixed housing and mixed-use zoning will promote diversity within neighborhoods (Cabrera and Najarian 2013).

However, many actual New Urbanist developments do not have a variety of incomes. New Urbanism is most often applied to wealthier developments, attempting to provide a community only to those who can afford it (Harvey 1997, Foreman 2006). Additionally, many New Urbanist developments, including some of the most well-known, such as Seaside and Laguna West, have no apartments (Furuseth 1997, Foreman

2006). One of the great insights by Jane Jacobs was the importance of diversity and a mixture of uses for urban success. Jacobs states that "cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody" (Jacobs 1961).

The ability to implement diverse New Urbanist developments is at a crossroads within this growing city of Kyle with ranging incomes and ethnicities. The primary goal of New Urbanism and its implementation within Kyle will be to build the community bridges that can fuel a cohesive diversity of growth and intertwine residents in east and west Kyle. Implementing large-scale regional planning techniques such as major public transportation connections will also give lower-income residents a cost-effective route to a diversity of jobs within the growing Austin economy.

Civic interaction within cities will determine whether our nation functions as a cohesive civic society in the future, or whether class rigidities and racial and social inequities predominate (Cisneros 1993). Sustainable planning at both the regional and local scale is outlined in the principles of New Urbanism: diversity, human-scale, conservation, and regionalism. Through the analysis of Kyle's 2010 Comprehensive Plan along with analyzing dimensions of sustainability within existing suburban neighborhoods in Kyle, we can begin to give perspective to the effectiveness of New Urbanism techniques at the local level and their ability to create diverse communities.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH THEMES AND METHODS

Research Questions

How well do local examples of New Urbanism developments in Kyle adhere to the principles of New Urbanism by creating diverse communities? Furthermore, as Kyle experiences booming population growth, how will the city's direction in planning align with the New Urbanist techniques of the adjacent cities in the corridor? These questions will be addressed by first analyzing the diversity of a Plum Creek compared to Steeplechase. The study will examine macro level demographics within these neighborhoods as well as urban form pertaining to walkability, perceptions, flexibility, and equity. Furthermore, the City of Kyle as a whole will be analyzed to examine how the city is planning for growth.

Study Areas: Plum Creek, Steeplechase

Established in 1997, Plum Creek is a 2,200-acre, mixed-use, master-planned New Urbanist community located in west Kyle. Steeplechase, located in east Kyle, is a more standard suburban subdivision and was also established in 1997. Both subdivisions are located near Kyle's Super Regional Node on opposite sides of IH 35 at Kyle Parkway exit and are in close proximity to the amenities and retail services at this Node. They are also both in the Mid-Town District as outlined by the 2010 Kyle Comprehensive Plan future land-use vision. See figures 3 and 4.
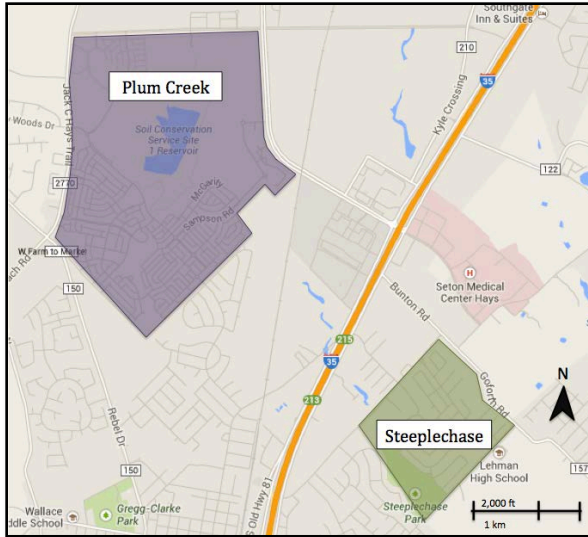
Figure 3. Plum Creek and Steeplechase
Map accessed through Google Maps, 2014.

Figure 4. Mid-Town District Map
Kyle 2010 Comprehensive Plan

Research Methods

In order to analyze how the Plum Creek and Steeplechase neighborhoods create

diversity, Kevin Lynch's Five Dimensions of *Good City Form* will be applied to evaluate

the form of the community. Observational analysis will be conducted in each

neighborhood to analyze the five dimensions of performance: *vitality, sense, fit, access,*

and *control.* These dimensions align with the Congress of New Urbanism charter to

promote "walkable, mixed-use neighborhood development, sustainable communities, and

healthier living conditions" and will serve as an indicator of diversity (CNU 2000).

Vitality is the degree to which the form of the neighborhood supports and protects

the inhabitants in terms of safety, health, and the environment. *Sense* is the degree to

which the neighborhood can be clearly perceived and mentally differentiated and

structured, in other words, what types of perceptions or identity does the neighborhood

convey? *Fit* is the adequacy of the neighborhood to be flexible and adaptable in the past

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and future. *Access* is the ability to reach other persons, activities, resources, services, or places in an equitable manner through forms of transportation. Finally, *control* is the degree to which the use and access to spaces and activities, and their creation, repair, modification, and management are controlled by those who use them. Each concept has been rephrased into a series of questions for analysis as well as adapted from research methods in *Assessing New Urbanism in Central Texas* (Vernon 2009). (See Chapter 4, Table 2)

Each of the questions is answered with either a no, somewhat, or yes. These answers were assigned values of zero, one, and two, respectively. After the analysis, the values are totaled and then indexed. "Good" urban forms have higher scores, and "poor" urban forms have lower scores. These dimensions of urban form will help evaluate the form of both neighborhoods and provide evidence of the strengths and failures of New Urbanism communities and the traditional suburban community. Macro level data will additionally be collected from both neighborhoods to provide data on income, ethnicity, and median house price. Finally, an overview of the Kyle 2010 Comprehensive Plan will provide additional information on the future visioning of Kyle's development.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Overview

To set up an empirical analysis, I will explain the results of both study neighborhoods. I will also explain various patterns that emerged from the subtotals of *Good Urban Form.* Some principles are universally applied, and some are universally omitted. Overall, Plum Creek scored an urban index percentage of 75% and Steeplechase scored an urban index percentage of 33%. Plum Creek scored higher than Steeplechase in all aspects of good urban form. Summarily, I will describe significant urban form findings in the Kyle Comprehensive Plan.

Table 1. Study Area Statistics. Data Source: 2010 US Census Bureau

	Plum Creek	Steeplechase	Kyle
Population	5,191	1,825	28,016
House Units	1,898	622	9,226
Population Density	2,668.47/sq mi.	4,806/sq mi.	1,468/sq mi.
Median Household Income	$78,641	$67,446	$75,470
Median House Price	$147,800	$129,000	$145,400
Race – White Non-Hispanic	70.3%	53.3%	53.6%
Race – Hispanic	29.6%	46.6%	46.3%

Table 2. Results

	Plum Creek	Steeple-chase
Vitality		
Are pedestrians safe on sidewalks or in the streets?	2	0
Does traffic negatively impact the neighborhood?	1	1
Does the design of the neighborhood encourage walking?	2	0
Does the neighborhood have open spaces and natural environments?	2	1
TOTAL	87.5%	25%
Sense		
Is the neighborhood distinct form its surroundings?	2	0
Are there special places within the neighborhood?	1	1
Is the neighborhood easily navigable?	1	1
Does the neighborhood design incorporate unique craftsmanship?	2	0
TOTAL	75%	25%
Fit		
Are lots well maintained?	2	1
Are roads well maintained?	2	1
Are civic buildings and schools integrated in the neighborhood?	2	2
Does the design grow from local building practice?	1	1
TOTAL	87.5%	62.5%
Access		
Are many activities within walking distance?	2	1
Does the street accommodate automobile and pedestrian traffic?	2	2
Does the neighborhood connect with the rest of the city?	0	0
Is mass transit within walking distance?	0	0
TOTAL	50%	25%
Control		
Is there a balance between public and private spaces?	2	1
Are streets and public spaces shared use?	2	1
Is the neighborhood mixed use?	1	0
Is the neighborhood compact?	1	0
TOTAL	75%	25%
URBAN INDEX OUT OF 40	30	13
TOTAL PERCENTAGE	75%	33%

Applied Principles in Both Neighborhoods

There are a few areas where both neighborhoods showed a definite "yes" to the principles of good urban form. Both Plum Creek and Steeplechase have schools integrated within the neighborhood. Plum Creek has incorporated an elementary school directly into the center of the community. A middle school and a high school are also adjacent to Plum Creek, however, they are divided by a larger three-lane highway and do not currently have any safe, walkable routes connecting the neighborhood. Steeplechase is directly in between an elementary and a high school. Although these schools are directly adjacent to the community and not specifically within the neighborhood boundary, they offer a viable aspect of access for residents.

Integrating schools, civic centers, public parks, and open spaces into neighborhood design is a good aspect of diversity in use within both neighborhoods. The integration of schools around Steeplechase, however, was not intentional and the neighborhood is conveniently placed between two schools and not specifically planned to be that way. This concept is outlined by Clarence Perry's concept of a *neighborhood unit* (Figure 5, 6). Neighborhoods planned through Perry's model embed civic buildings, parks, and schools into the center of a neighborhood so that residents can reach these facilities within a five-minute walking radius. This concept exists in Plum Creek, where the school is a dominant focal point. In Steeplechase, however, they exist on the periphery due to mere convenience as opposed to thoughtful design

Another applied principle of good urban form is that streets within both neighborhoods accommodate both automobiles and pedestrians. Plum Creek and Steeplechase have navigable streets and sidewalks where pedestrians can choose to either

Figure 5. The Original Neighborhood Unit.
Clarence Perry, 1929.

Figure 6. The Modern Neighborhood Unit. Douglas Farr, 2008.

walk on the sidewalk or ride a bicycle in the street. Steeplechase, however, is lacking

design principles seen in Plum Creek such as green space medians separating the road

and the sidewalk as larger street widths. Both neighborhoods score high within the *Fit*

aspect of analysis indicating that the form and space of each neighborhood matches the

pattern and actions that people customarily engage in. In other words, they connect

residents very effectively to local schools and reduce daily commuting time by giving

children and parents walkable and convenient access to these schools.

Principles Not Applied in Both Neighborhoods

Both neighborhoods score a definite "no" in two areas of analysis. Plum Creek

and Steeplechase do not connect well with the rest of the city and mass transit is not

within walking distance of both neighborhoods. Plum Creek is separated from both the

Super Regional Node of commercial activity at Kyle Parkway as well as Kyle's

Downtown district at Center Street. Although Plum Creek is relatively close to the

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commercial activity at Kyle Parkway, getting there necessitates a car. Steeplechase is almost a mirror image of Plum Creek in terms of its location across from the major I-35 artery. Steeplechase is also in between both commercial nodes at Kyle Parkway and Center Street and does not include any viable connection to these nodes without driving or crossing I-35. Both neighborhoods do not possess any forms of mass transit or public transportation. Although Plum Creek's master plan does include a future light-rail stop, there is no current evidence of bus services within the city or a route connecting to Austin or San Antonio.

Despite the current lack of mass transportation connection, the intended design for Plum Creek does incorporate connectivity for both the city of Kyle and the northern and southern corridor in the future. This intentional plan to develop around this mass transit opportunity is an important concept outlined in the CNU charter stating that, "land uses should be within walking distance of transit stops, permitting public transit to become a viable alternative to the automobile" (CNU 2000). This notion of *intended planning* sets Plum Creek apart from Steeplechase by distinguishing between a considerate planning scheme as opposed to Steeplechase's neighborhood design where mass transit in planning and application is absent. This lack of connection between each neighborhood and the rest of the city as well as between the corridor is an issue that can be further addressed by analyzing the Kyle Comprehensive Plan.

Figure 7. Plum Creek Neighborhood. Photos by Andrea Villalobos, 2014.

Plum Creek scores higher than Steeplechase in all areas of urban form. Plum Creek scored relatively high in terms of safety in health in both the social and environmental aspects of Kevin Lynch's *vitality*. The neighborhood established a strong presence of pedestrian safe sidewalks and streets as well as traffic-calming devices such as medians, roundabouts, neck-downs, narrow streets, on street parking, and large tree canopies within street medians. Various public spaces such as the park, the golf course, the back yard, the courtyard, the wooded walking trails, the alleyways, or even the streets provide a place for children, adults, or families to interact. Roads and streets are well maintained and provide walkable and bikeable *access.* Additionally, the development

incorporates aspects of mixed-use: an apartment complex, single-family housing, a nursing and rehabilitation home, a senior living community, and a few commercial retail lots.

Despite the positive attributes of Plum Creek's New Urban design, areas of definite "bad" urban form were within the *access* category. The CNU address *access* and connectivity stating, "many activities of daily living should occur within walking distance, allowing independence to those who do not drive, especially the elderly and the young. Interconnected networks of streets should be designed to encourage walking, reduce the number and length of automobile, and conserve energy" (CNU 2000). *Access* within the boundary of Plum Creek is demonstrated by accommodating automobiles in a manner that respects pedestrians on well-maintained sidewalks. Bicycle lanes, however, are absent within the neighborhood but are perhaps compensated by considerable traffic-calming mechanisms and the integration of back-end parking that pulls resident automobiles off the front streets and places them behind houses in the alleyway. The most significant example of "bad" *access* within Plum Creek is outlined by a lack of connectivity to the rest of the city. Sidewalks and bicycle routes are absent beyond the boundary of Plum Creek and eliminate the effectiveness of New Urbanist principles to extend beyond the white-picket fence boundary. Summarily, it is disconnected from larger, macro structures and systems.

Analysis of Steeplechase

Figure 8. Steeplechase Neighborhood. Photos by Andrea Villalobos, 2014.

Steeplechase scores lower than Plum Creek in terms of good urban form, yet still incorporates a few areas of positive scores. Steeplechase scored high in terms of *Fit.* These characteristics include well-maintained lots, roads, the integration of schools, and building practice allowing the neighborhood to *fit* well with its surroundings. Steeplechase's placement between two schools creates the opportunity for walkability for high school and elementary students to and from school and further demands well-maintained pedestrian routes to these buildings. While these routes do include sidewalks and crosswalks, their maintenance needs improvement. Large streets within the neighborhood allow room for bicyclists but also increase the speed of automobile traffic

and front-end parking along streets congests the walkability of the street and hinders the safety of bicyclists and pedestrians.

Steeplechase scores equally low in areas of *vitality, sense, access,* and *control*. The primary element missing from Steeplechase is the incorporation of mixed-use development. Without the integration of other uses near or within the neighborhood, pedestrian and bicyclists mobility is non-existent, the neighborhood is unable to integrate a distinct *sense* of place that sets it apart from other subdivisions, *access* to businesses or town is limited, and the neighborhood is less compact and community oriented and far more dependent upon the automobile to get to the center of town. In order to create good neighborhood design, "concentrations of civic, institutional, and commercial activity should be embedded in neighborhoods and districts, not isolated in remote single-use complexes" (CNU 2000). Steeplechase's proximity to schools and its large adjacent park allow the community to thrive as a well-connected community environment, but the lack of properly configured walking routes, city connection, and mixed use services hinder the diversity of community interaction.

Evaluation of the 2010 Kyle Comprehensive Plan

The Kyle Comprehensive Plan provides a record of the community's goals and visions and supplies guidance for future municipal decisions. After careful assessment of the city's current and future needs, residents of Kyle express desire for "increasing the sense of community, connectivity, and civic institutions within the City" (Kyle Comp Plan, 1). Public participation within the city during this planning process have narrowed down primary elements that residents believe need improvement. The oversight of this

comprehensive plan can help bridge the issues of Plum Creek and Steeplechase that

address city connectivity and overall access to services within the region.

To determine strategic goals for the Comprehensive Plan, community members

participated in public workshops where verbal comments, input, and notes were analyzed

by a consultant team (MESA) and then translated into formal Action Statements. During

the second community workshop participants rated a total of 85 Action Statements

outlined by the consultant team to designate the community's top priorities. The top five

Strategic Community Goals are outlined below:

1. Create Integrated and inter-connected mixed use districts
2. Ensure that land use and transportation plans are complimentary, so that development does not overburden Kyle thoroughfares.
3. Promote creative residential development design that supports neighborhood identity and social interaction.
4. Enhance connections between districts using roads, trails, sidewalks, and open spaces.
5. Provide linkages between downtown and new commercial centers.

The final top scoring 28 goals outlined by community input are then outlined within nine

overall themes. The top five strategic community goals outlined above stress resident's

awareness and desire for increased connectivity and identity in Kyle. These are two

elements that were inadequate or absent in the previous case study research for both Plum

Creek and Steeplechase and lowered the scores for both neighborhoods "good" planning

analysis. Addressing these two issues as key goals within the macro level-planning

framework of the Comprehensive Plan may help to improve the diversified access and

connectivity for not only Plum Creek and Steeplechase in isolation, but to the city as a

whole.

The Kyle Comprehensive Plan further outlines a few key processes to address the

issues of connectivity and identity within the area of Plum Creek and Steeplechase.

Kyle's Future Land Use Plan designates the area as the "Mid Town District". Currently

characterized by residential development with curvilinear streets and open spaces,

neighborhood legibility and continuity is enhanced through yards, porches and other

shared spaces. This District enjoys close proximity to amenities, such as open spaces,

downtown, commercial nodes, and transit options and is therefore well-positioned to

define an economic and lifestyle pattern unique to Kyle (Kyle Comp Plan, 142). The

Kyle Comprehensive Plan encourages mid to high-residential uses in this area and

encourages that the "legibility of neighborhood identity, definition, and transportation

should be improved through trails, sidewalks, signage, and interconnected shared spaces"
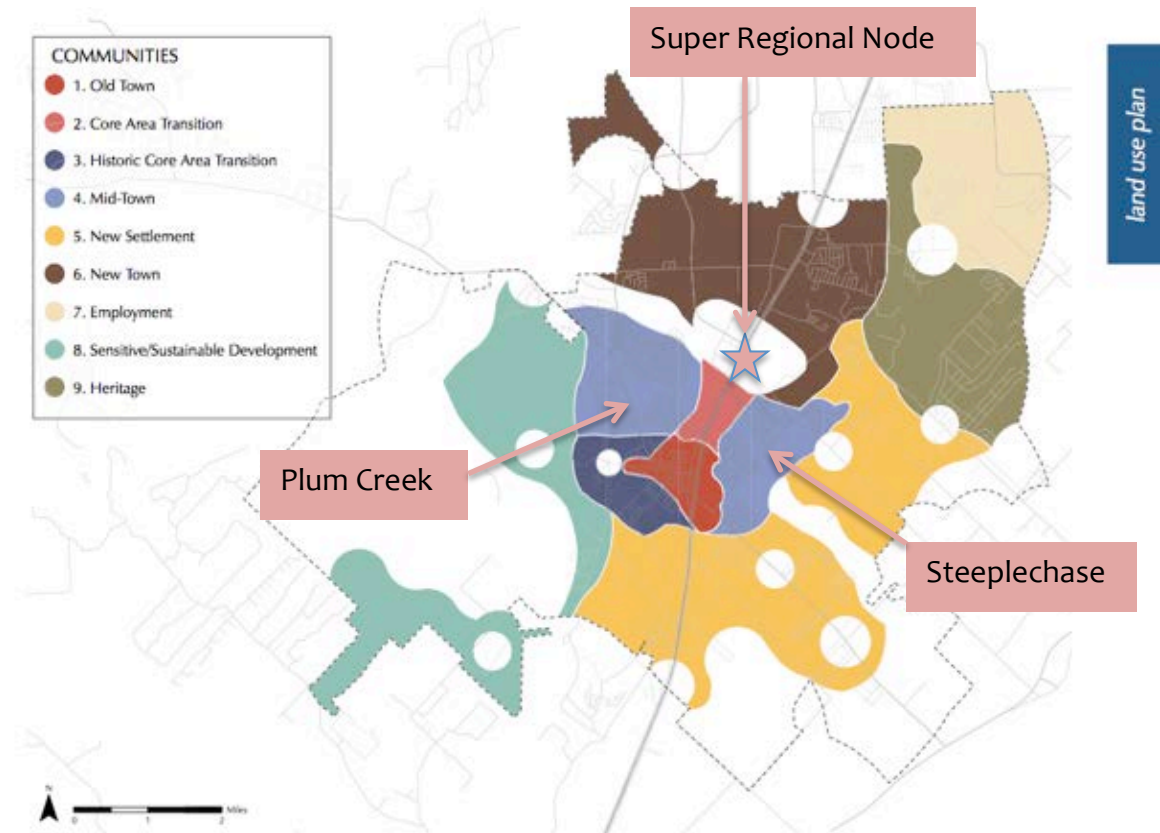
(Kyle Comp Plan, 142).

Figure 8. 2010. Kyle Communities Map. Plum Creek and Steeplechase are highlighted in
Midtown District adjacent to Super Regional Node. (*Kyle Comp Plan, 135*)

The close proximity of Kyle's Super Regional Node to both neighborhoods also provides a unique opportunity for connection, access, and diversity in use. This area should focus on "unique retail offerings, rather than over-reliance on ubiquitous convenience retail… to create a diverse commercial and employment center" (Kyle Comp Plan, 160). This node should "encourage visitors to extend their stay due to unique and diverse uses and connections to other areas of Kyle" (Kyle Comp Plan, 160). The highest level of development intensity in Kyle exists here and "due to the diversity of uses in the Node, appropriate land use transitions to adjacent communities is critical" (Kyle Comp Plan, 160). Land Use recommendations for this area include zoning classifications of Apartments, Multifamily Residential 2, Residential Condominiums, Hospital Services, and Central Business District 1, 2. This transitional design of low to high density provides connection opportunities for both Plum Creek and Steeplechase.

An analysis of the Kyle Comprehensive Plan further reflects the issues of *good* or *bad* planning between New Urbanism and a standard suburban neighborhood in terms of scope. While each neighborhood has its own individual boundaries that can create a local identity and "sense of place", the overall character and interaction with the city around the neighborhood is just as significant for creating a diverse community. Diversity, therefore, can expand beyond a neighborhood's fence and reaches out to goods, services, facilities, businesses, civic areas, and open spaces that are adjacent to the community. The diversity of uses becomes dependent upon the access to these outside places and the existence of "third places" such as coffee shops, parks, community centers, or special areas that we seek out in addition to our home or work environment. While Plum Creek and Steeplechase may exist as different entities on the urban planning spectrum, they are

nonetheless within the same macro body of a city community. Analyzing diversity within

these two communities becomes a larger subject to grasp.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Assessment of Diversity in Overall Results

Based on the results of this study, there is a difference in urban form between Steeplechase and Plum Creek. Plum Creek scores higher than Steeplechase in all five dimensions of *Good Urban Form* and thus creates a more diverse community in terms of vitality, sense, fit, access, and control. Plum Creek offers mixed-use development, housing diversity from single-family to apartments, incorporates civic buildings, open spaces, and encourages walkability. Steeplechase's design is severely lacking in housing diversity, walkability, and mixed use, and thus, its ability to facilitate a diverse community is low.

Despite the individual urban form of both neighborhoods, there is a lack of connection between both neighborhoods and the rest of Kyle as well as a lack of viable transportation options. The neighborhoods are automobile-dominated, commuter-oriented, and separate residents from the larger scope of the city. While one neighborhood may succeed in micro-level diversity, both neighborhoods are disconnected to how most Kyle residents commute to work, engage in commerce, and recreate. There are visible advantages to diversity at the micro level in terms of neighbor interaction or sociability, but micro-diversity does not translate to cohesive diversity in which people interact in larger spatial settings.

Micro and Macro Diversity

At the micro level, a diverse community is created in a variety of ways. For example, Plum Creek's numerous *pocket parks* create resident interaction because they are evenly distributed throughout the neighborhood. Residents can walk short distances to these parks, and have the ability to frequently engage in social interaction. *Embedded civic buildings*, especially schools, in Plum Creek and Steeplechase enhance micro-level diversity as well. Students in Plum Creek can walk short distances to schools without crossing a busy street or depending on a car for transport. At the micro-level, New Urbanist design styles clearly create more diversity than a standard suburban neighborhood.

Plum Creek also demonstrated more diverse demographics (See Chapter 4, Table 1). Critics of New Urbanism often argue that instead of promoting diversity and community, New Urbanist neighborhoods only attract affluent, mostly white residents, as they have been developed as expensive places to live. This critique is not supported in the comparisons of Plum Creek and Steeplechase where both demographics (median household income and median house price) reflect Kyle's statistical average and do not present any significant differences. The goal of Plum Creek is to create a community where homes are priced in the $100,000s instead of the $400,000s. Additionally, Plum Creek offers a mix of housing options, from larger single-family homes, to senior living, to multiple apartment complexes. The neighborhood provides an affordable option for a diversity of incomes.

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The Spatial Problem

It is difficult to create a unique setting or neighborhood in the conventionally

suburban landscape of Kyle. The landscape is swarming with new subdivisions as Kyle's

population continues to grow. Residents can choose from a variety of standard suburban

neighborhoods or they can choose a New Urbanist counterpart. Nevertheless, whether

residents live in a New Urbanist or standard suburban neighborhood, the surrounding city

design and infrastructure does not support true New Urbanist ideals. The city's role for

connecting the fabric of the city proves to be more important for creating cohesive

diversity than micro-level neighborhood interaction.

Kyle presents its own challenges for designing and building a neighborhood that is

dense, mixed-use, and aligns with the ideals of the Congress of New Urbanism Charter.

The New Urbanist principles in Plum Creek seem to only serve in distinguishing the

neighborhood from other bedroom subdivisions that abound in Kyle. There are no major

employment centers, to serve the residents of Plum Creek, or any other subdivision for

that matter. There is no mass transportation in the city to alleviate the dependence on the

automobile, and there is no focus on density or mixed-use development seen in the rest of

the city.

The results of this study reveal that the situation in Kyle is more of a spatial

problem. Creating a more diverse community depends on more than the developer, or

even the principles of New Urbanism, and should be considered in light of the city and

region as a whole. In a landscape where suburban sprawl is the norm, the goals outlined

in the CNU Charter are much harder to achieve economically, socially, and politically.

Collaboration becomes an important tool for bridging a New Urbanist neighborhood,

such as Plum Creek, to a sprawling city.

<div align="center">**Achieving Cohesive Diversity**</div>

Plum Creek sets a precedent for implementing similarly designed options in Kyle. Now that the bar is set, the opportunities for expanding New Urbanist practices are a viable option, whether it is through encouraging mixed-use development, or creating zoning changes. The goal is to shed sprawl-inducing zoning regulations and restructure the philosophy of city design to create a reorganized, unique place. Plum Creek landscape architect, Sean Compton, commented on the importance of collaboration to reach New Urbanist goals:

> "New Urbanism is not something done in isolation by one person sitting at a desk. It's very collaborative. It involves stakeholders working together with a common goal. The complexity [of planning] is not that complex when everyone is sitting together with a common goal. Good planning is about planning affordability and providing a mixture of economic types. Its not about location, but about attribute" (Compton 2014).

Residents, developers, and local leaders exist as powerful stakeholders in the planning process. These entities have the power to create new ideas and innovations in planning that can change the sprawling Central Texas landscape. There is more than one method to urban design, and New Urbanism presents a viable alternative to sprawl. These stakeholders have the power to expand new philosophies throughout Kyle so that New Urbanist neighborhoods can shed their isolation and achieve cohesive diversity.

Kyle's growth provides a powerful opportunity for achieving cohesive and diversified urban form at the city level. This attractive, developing area is managing and planning for increasing growth in both residential, commercial, medical, and education sectors. Currently, Kyle's economic diversity is below average. The current economic strategy that welcomes any and all development with few restrictions will only contribute

to a lack of a variety of employment options. Simply attracting more of what already exists along the I-35 corridor will only make matters worse for the City in the long run and there is a real danger that Kyle will lose its identity (Kyle Comp Plan, 23).

Recommendations for improvement include building less *traffic-oriented* patterns of development such as gas stations, convenience stores or big box retail, and incorporate more *destination-oriented* development of specialized, higher price-point, and durable goods shopping. This increases the variety of goods within the city and lowers the need to commute through the corridor to buy or do something you could find right in town. Expanded transportation services will also increase connectivity. Despite Plum Creek's motto for "driving less and doing more", Census Bureau (2010) data indicated that 78% of Plum Creek residents commuted and drove alone to work by car. Only 13% of residents carpooled and 0% used public transportation or walked. Furthermore, Kyle's overall commute statistics similarly correlate this poor transportation trend. 78.6% of residents drive alone, 14.4% commute, and less than 1% walked or bicycled to work (Census 2010). Summarily, expanding Kyle's transportation system as a whole would provide residents expanded commute options and decrease car-dependence. Services such as light rail, or a rapid bus system would be beneficial to increase the level of *access* for residents throughout the city.

Kyle's employment sector is growing beyond its former retail-dominated character. The opening of an Austin Community College branch as well as the Seton Medical Center will attract a wide range of specialized jobs. Creating a unique city will ensure that residents employed in Kyle live in Kyle as well. It is imperative that planning for the future becomes a collaborative process between the city, the city's builders, and the

citizens, and that creative development options are encouraged. Creating tax incentives, abatements, or bonuses for businesses that align with the priorities outlined in the Comprehensive Plan can ensure progress for achieving Kyle's vision for a diversified economic community.

Residents of cities reach out towards local leaders and entities to address quality of life in the form of public participation and opinion. Kyle's public participation is promising for New Urbanist ideas. Citizens have established their vision and priorities for their community and outlined the importance of *access* and *connection* within the city. Common themes include the desire for linkages between downtown and new commercial centers, enhanced connection between mixed-use districts, and creative residential development design. The Comprehensive Plan begins to implement these desires by defining unique districts. Each district presents its own challenges of enhancement and enrichment and must find its own identity, unique character, and connection to the future city. The power for implementing this change is in the hands of the community's stakeholders who must bring together the private and public sectors to achieve sustainable and diverse communities. The problem is that the conventional spatial surroundings and planning stereotypes of the area hinder the effectiveness of New Urbanism and its goals for diversity.

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CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The goal of New Urbanism cannot solely be achieved by the plan of one neighborhood. New Urbanism's ability to create diverse communities is dependent upon the market, the local planning direction, and the ideals and goals of the community. The City of Kyle's role in urban design is just as important for cohesive diversity as the elements of an individual neighborhood such as Plum Creek or even Steeplechase are. While there are differences between the level of diversity and urban form between a New Urbanist neighborhood and a standard suburban sprawl neighborhood, the greater goal of connectivity lies in the hands of further collaboration of city leaders, the community, and private developers.

A diverse community cannot exist in isolation. It is dependent upon the interaction of everybody because everybody essentially creates it. Cities aggregate people and places in a geography that is large enough to make a difference but small enough to impart a sense of community. In order to achieve sustainability and redefine the definition of planning, the layers of physical, social, and economic collaboration must coexist and only then can we move into an era of planning for people, places, and diversity.

Diversity in people and places creates a city's identity. Diversity of people and the urban fabric creates a collaborative identity where people connect with their city. This

cohesive diversity, in which micro and macro urban form combine, becomes a key indication for sustainability in Kyle and cities around the world. Increased focus on aligning the goals of theregion, the city, the neighborhoods, and the residents fosters community identity so that diversity can be created not just within the boundaries of a single neighborhood but in all areas of spatial and social interaction.

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