

# Read It Here

news culture outdoors

*Serving the Quad Cities and the Central Highlands*



Growth...  
Where are we going?

No. 6

May 2007



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Printed on recycled paper

On the cover: The Prescott Lakes Parkway traffic mover snakes up to the malls and car dealers. RIH photo/Jason Bordonaro

# Growing with grace

## Traditional urban development goes by new name

By Erica Ryberg

Mike Arntzen stares out a leased window in an industrial Prescott Valley strip mall with something like joy. The road outside is chewed up and awaiting a major project.

"We're sitting on a gold mine," he said.

Valley day, his bet—and at \$300,000, it's no small one—seems to be paying off.

### The New Urbanism

The Parkway is a small expression of a growing movement dubbed by some the "New Urbanism." Its aim is to adopt the best of traditional urban planning and incorporate it into new and existing development. In the case of the Parkway, Community Development Director Richard Parker hopes to make the corridors along Prescott Valley more walkable and bike friendly, which should also boost businesses for outfits like Arntzen's. He says he sold the idea for the Parkway with a picture of a mother who, in the absence of a sidewalk, was pushing her baby carriage through a Prescott Valley ditch.

There's more to the New Urbanism than sidewalks, though. The movement got its official start in 1993 when architects including Peter Calthorpe, Andrés Duany and Duany's wife Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk founded the Congress for the New Urbanism. They developed a charter, a set of city codes for urban planning (more on that later) and before long, a rabid following.

The concepts draw on pre-World War II planning which the architects feel are in direct opposition to the more suburban modes of planning that arose after the war. Suburbia, they feel, forces dependence on the automobile, alienation of people within their communities and by extension, obesity and depression. It is sprawling ugliness, too, gobbling up the landscape at a faster rate than the population grows. In short, they maintain, it's not a good thing.

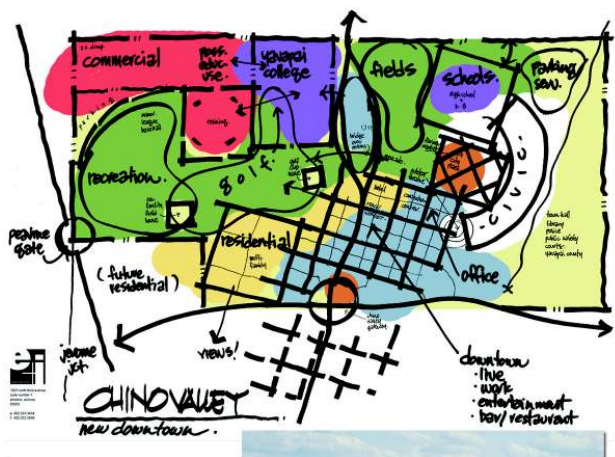
To get a feel for what their own planning looks like, take a stroll through downtown Prescott's town square. Surrounding the square, businesses come right up to the sidewalk, making it easy for people to stroll, people-watch and window shop. Above many of the shops are apartments, providing "eyes on the street"—security—and a more vibrant round the clock use of the urban space. The only parking on the square is street parking, relegating the automobile to a secondary rather than primary position.

Coffee shops, along with plaza-style shopping centers like the Old Firehouse Plaza, around the corner from the square, provide for the basic human need to gather, relax and interact. When it's finished, the dozen or so shops and restaurants of the Old Firehouse Plaza will surround a small plaza with the parking on the periphery—a patently New Urban design.

The courthouse plaza, too, has its place in the New Urbanism, which states that civic buildings should anchor town centers and that parks

should be within walking distance for every resident of a town.

Speaking of residences, visit any New Urban development and you'll notice that the old begets the new. Porches lean off the front of every house, and garages hide in the back. This gives more room for on-street parking and more importantly, stresses the importance of the human over the machine. The most famous of these developments is Seaside, Florida, the picture-perfect insta-town that Duany and Plater-Zyberk built from scratch in the late 1980s.



New downtown Chino Valley: Chino Valley joins in the New Urban ballyhoo with its proposed downtown, "Old Home Manor." If built, it will be the "center of the world," according to Jerry Stricklin. Glassford Hill Road is expected to snake six lanes up to Chino Valley from Prescott Valley; the new downtown will lie between Glassford Hill Road and Highway 89.



Antelope graze beyond a fence at the boundary of Chino Valley. The town's planning director, Jerry Stricklin, says that in the coming decades, growth will fling houses east across the valley. Maintaining the city's character and preserving the landforms (as opposed to chopping them off a la Prescott Lakes) are top priorities. RIIH photo/Erica Ryberg

He and his sister Julie Aiani have staked out their territory on the leading edge of the development of the Prescott Valley Parkway, an incipient beautification project that will span the length of the town once it's completed. Their business is the newly minted Lonesome Valley Food & Wine, and like Prescott Valley itself it's a smear of old and new. At one end sit the accouterments of a typical diner, pole-backed chairs and nondescript tables, cowboy pictures and a television. On the other end of the little deli-style eatery is a nook of a wine bar complete with a wine tasting area and a fountain. The food, too, is high quality comfort food, the international best of the best in cheeses and meats and, Arntzen says, immeasurable love going into the... meatloaf.

He's planning a patio, and he's betting that despite his location in a fairly industrialized part of town—Lumberman's is across the street—the people will come. On a typically gusty Prescott

### What's in a name?

*The New Urbanism goes by many names. Here are a few of them (with props to wikipedia):*

- Traditional Neighborhood Design
- Transit-Oriented Development
- Neotraditional Design
- New Pedestrianism
- European Urban Renaissance
- Smart Growth

### Weaning off suburbia

Surprisingly, in many small ways and a few big ones, the New Urbanism has come to the Prescott area as well. One of the most notable examples is SunCor's development, StoneRidge. Known previously for its hand in developing the super-suburban Prescott Lakes, SunCor has scaled down and gone dense up on Jackass Flats in Prescott Valley. SunCor cleared away acres of scrub, put in a golf course and developed StoneRidge, with dense cookie cutter houses, duplexes and a community center. Practically the only alleys that developers have built in the last half century trace straight lines behind the little houses with their wide sidewalks, front porches and bikes lanes. The sales office is about to repurpose into a village center-style shopping area.

Despite or perhaps because of its many nods to the New Urbanism, StoneRidge gets mixed reviews.

At issue is the density of the development. Ask the average person if they want to live on a small lot with other houses nearby and the answer typically is not just "No," but "Hell no." It's an important crux, because with clustered development come many good things, like mass transit, walkable

neighborhoods and the chance to avoid the economically fueled blight of sprawl. Again, ask the average person if they live in sprawl, and they'll say, "No." Out among the oak trees and grassland at the base of Granite Mountain lives Laura Entwistle, a 50-something entrepreneur from Pasadena. She chose her subdivision, Granite Oaks, mainly because she felt that high-density development wouldn't catch up to her there.

In nearby Prescott, developers and bureaucrats alike struggle to find ways to increase density without setting off the NIMBY mousetrap. One of those developers, John Finn, builds community-oriented New Urban-style density for the wealthy, aging residents of Forest Trails. To make developments like Finn's more palatable to existing residents, Prescott's planning code now calls for a buffer between the dense and less dense. No stranger to NIMBY battles (see "Paradise Subdivided" in Read It Here's December 2006 issue), Finn has given that and then some in his latest development.

Despite his yen for bungalows, condos and parkland within the bounds of his developments, Finn doesn't call his projects New Urbanist. "It's like they did back East," he told me.

### History becomes destiny

Prescott, as it was conceived in 1864, is a lot like back East as well—and for good reason. In fact, Prescott is Prescott because of Abraham Lincoln. Toward the end of the civil war, Lincoln sent a party of bureaucrats out to the little soggy valley at the north end of the Bradshaws to create a territorial capital far removed from the territory's only population center, Confederacy-gripped Tucson.

The men brought their planning predilections with them.

"The streets were laid out by Robert Groom and Van Smith, because most of the government officials who came here were from the East Coast and Midwest," said the city's historic preservation officer, Nancy Burgess. "They wanted nice wide streets you could turn a [horse] team around, and they wanted it laid out in a grid."

Enter the car. Today that grid gives traffic more places to go, and bicyclists back streets to use instead of arterials.

But after World War II ended, the character of many neighborhoods changed to accommodate

what Richard Parker calls "this behemoth skin called an automobile." From a bird's eye view, their layout changed from clustered to linear. Parker's own project, Prescott Valley, is considering preservation of its "old town," which is in fact a strip of development from the 1970s. Despite its recent founding, the town has seen tremendous changes.

"I remember sitting at my desk in the hovel back on Yavapai Street," Parker said. "The staff had a bowl of chocolate-covered raisins that they kept as a joke, calling them petrified antelope turds."

Parker, who regards himself "a very fine bureaucrat," came in one morning to find raisins strewn across his desk. He thought that someone was playing a joke on him until he heard a shuffling sound and realized that mice were eating the chocolate off the raisins.

"And it was disgusting," he said, pausing for emphasis. "I remember thinking this place is going to be a lot of work."

That work led Parker and the Fain family (the Fains were in Lonesome Valley when it was just cows and coyotes and have a stake in most of what goes down in PV) to bring in the New Urbanist superhero Peter Calthorpe. His involvement has yielded mixed results. While Parker and Prescott Valley are conversant in Smart Growth and New Urban concepts, they tend to apply them principally in a linear format through projects like the PV Parkway. While Peter Calthorpe's Prescott Valley Town Center builds in a circle, it builds within a city code that literally demands more real estate for cars than for people.

### Car Culture

And that's the rub: our visionaries say that we need to relinquish our dependence on cars (this might come anyway, says Prescott City Manager Steve Norwood, when fuel prices hit \$12 a gallon). But our city codes mandate that cars deserve the prime real estate and lots of it. People love their cars, and even those who don't love them suffer without them, because the DNA of our city codes call for an expansive car habitat.

Still, says local architect Matt Ackerman, you can plan for more supportive centers of commerce by placing the parking at the periphery and creating walkable development within. He just did a spec for what would have been a large shopping center at the base of Glassford Hill in Prescott

Valley. His plan called for a graceful S-curve of parking on the edge and a walkable complex of plazas and alleys at the heart of the development.

"Our client came in and said 'I like what you guys have done, but I want you take a bomb, put it in the middle and blow this thing up. I want all the parking in the middle and I want all the buildings out around the perimeter,'" Ackerman recalled.

Of Prescott, he added, "It's frustrating because people come to Prescott because of the downtown square and its urban quality, yet

*A view of duplexes around a StoneRidge pocket park. With bike paths, hiking trails, back alleys and no building on the hilltops, SunCor's new take on development puts the human before the human mover. Some people dismiss StoneRidge as too dense, but you may see more developments like this overtake suburban-style development in the coming years.*



everything that the city is doing and supporting and tax subsidizing is anything but that. And so the city is spreading out with this thing that no one ever really wants. And yet it's this little jewel in the center that keeps drawing people back."

So much for a new vision, in that case at least. And so the car-oriented sprawl development continues.

### Sprawl—good or bad?

Robert Bruegmann, who wrote the sprawl-lovin' manifesto *Sprawl: A Compact History*, points out that people who complain about sprawl often do so because things are good. It takes a healthy economy and a growing populace to encourage sprawl, after all. And as Prescott City

*Matt Ackerman and Jeff Zucker, both architects with Catalyst Architecture, planned this shopping center in the Verde Valley to be human-scale rather than car-scale. The duo have designed pedestrian friendly developments throughout the United States and Europe, including the pedestrian-oriented Manzanita Village in south Prescott. Appropriately, their office is a few steps from the courthouse square. Drawing courtesy of Catalyst Architecture.*



Manager Norwood pointed out, retail follows rooftops, which begets more good times.

Sprawl happens and has happened in a typical pattern for centuries, says Bruegmann. And he points out that if you wait long enough, sprawl gains historic value. "As hard as it is to imagine today, by the time the landscape around the now-treeless subdivision of look-alike stucco boxes at the edge of suburban Las Vegas fully matures, the subdivisions will be likely candidates for historic

*Urban Planning continued on page 18*



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landmark designation. Most urban change, no matter how wrenching for one generation, tends to be the accepted norm of the next and the cherished heritage of the one after that."

Maybe so, but the frog-in-the-heating-stockpot effect might be in full force too. Or, in the case of the Prescott area, maybe the third generation won't clearly remember what a pronghorn antelope looks like.

Perhaps StoneRidge, with its preserved hilltops, pocket parks and wide bike-ped paths will be a candidate for historic preservation once the trees mature and the patina sets. And for that matter, so might other SunCor projects.

Bill Woodward, SunCor's info-spinner, said in an email, "The vast majority of our projects are incorporating New Urban design. Our future trend will be to design communities that are respectful of the land, the views, open space, the history and architecture of the local communities, and the amenities that residents expect—while incorporating appropriate elements of New Urban Design on a project-by-project basis."

As traditional forms fade (or burn down— due to city parking requirements, the historic apartment building at Willis and Montezuma Streets in Prescott can't legally be rebuilt as it was) what comes next?

A lot of people say the New Urbanism. Richard Parker says "That's where it's at."

Andrés Duany, not surprisingly, says that he thinks it's going to become the dominant building form.

It might be a stretch to suggest it, but even Proposition 400, the citizen-initiated law that says that the people have a right to comment on big annexations, might drive smart growth in Prescott. If there's one thing that the council, manager and planners all agree on, it's that the growth near the airport needs to happen on land that falls within the city limits. Well, "need" is a strong word, but the tax windfall from a giant master-planned community is pretty compelling.

"If those homes are going to be built anyway, and we're going to get impacted, I'd rather have some of the money to go with it," said Norwood.

And to get the citizens of Prescott, some of whom have already proven themselves a formidable smart-growth lobby, to buy in, what gets master planned and built out there better be nice. And human scale. And walkable. And dense, as opposed to sprawl. According to Prescott mayoral candidate and Prop 400 proponent Jack Wilson, it'll take regional cooperation if planning for the region is going to have any teeth. And he said, "When you start planning

for smart growth on a regional basis you can do things like transportation."

An important point since most everyone agrees that after water, traffic is a huge issue for the area.

In downtown Prescott, a historic preservation overlay district makes it easier to build in a traditional manner. The historic preservation overlay encourages development and infill consistent with the historic buildings that fill the tourist-dollar driven downtown area.

Applied without a neo-traditional philosophy it becomes the new Summit Bank, built right up to the sidewalk, but with its entrances facing the parking lot. But with a more traditional approach, it might become storefronts on the mainlevel, concealed parking and living space above, as is planned for the opposing corners of Goodwin and Montezuma Streets.

#### Looking toward the future

Meanwhile, out in Chino Valley, the growth machine is just heating up. Jerry Stricklin, the Chino Valley planning director, says that the big challenge for the most rural of the quad-cities is how to keep that quality and still provide lifestyle amenities. Turning towards a map on his wall, Stricklin points to an open expanse east of the highway and tells me, "That will be the center of the world."

To illustrate, he produces a schematic for a New Urban town center whose destination will be the grasslands off of Perkinsville Road.

Ab Jackson, the Director of the Chino Valley Chamber of Commerce notes that he'll probably be incapable of controlling his drooling by the time the town gets around to implementing the plan, but it's still something to shoot for. Though, admittedly, the pronghorn might disagree.

So too, might Tony Brown, the personality behind the Ecosa Institute, Prescott's very own green design school. Brown, like Matt Ackerman, spent time at Arcosanti before coming to Prescott—in Brown's case, most of the 1970s and 80s. And he's not interested in anything as mild as the New Urbanism as a cure for planning ills. He's got a point: you can walk around a place like StoneRidge, but you can't reasonably get there without a car.

Arcosanti, the self-sustaining concrete hive off of I-17 that's built in three dimensions without roads, is still the best urban alternative that man's come up with, says Brown. Anything less is still less. But even Brown holds out some hope:

"Ultimately, you don't plan for people, you plan for cars, and planners are now beginning to realize that. People say you can't change [sprawl]—you can't stop it. But of course we can. Trend is not destiny."



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