Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) in Pennsylvania & Beyond

by: Thomas J. Comitta, AICP, RLA, ASLA

April 10, 2010
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Camp Grandpop: 1956 to 1971
(E. Santoleri & Sons - 1956 to 1966)
(Santoleri Brothers, Inc - 1967 - 1971)

The Neighborhood Store - Manayunk: 1960’s
There were 12 Corner Stores in Manayunk within a 5 to 10 minute walk of 4518 Smick Street
The Manayunk Canal Towpath has been resurrected to serve strollers, joggers, shoppers, bicyclists, and industrial archeologists. The Canal ceased operations before World War II, and was left as a dormant waterway for over 30 years.

In 1971, Thomas J. Comitta, then a Senior Landscape Architecture Student at Penn State, prepared the “Historic Renewal Plan for the Manayunk Canal.

This undergraduate thesis was used by the Manayunk Neighborhood Council to persuade former Mayor Greene to fund the cleanup of the Canal.

By 1980, when the first Canal Day was celebrated, the Canal helped to signal the rebirth of Main Street in Manayunk. Today the Canal Towpath is used by thousands of bicyclists traveling from Valley Forge to Philadelphia.
A Historic Renewal Plan for
The Manayunk Canal

Prepared for:
Manayunk Neighborhood Council

Prepared by:
Thomas J. Comitta
Senior Landscape Architecture Student, Penn State University

June 1971

Manayunk Canal Report: 1971
The Rockefeller Foundation provided a grant to the Regional Field Service at the HGSD, to fund the work in Barnstable, Mass. 

**Land Resource Analysis & A Plan for Open Space Barnstable, Massachusetts (1972 to 1973)**
Pennwood: Conventional Plan
This plan was prepared by others. It was rejected by the Caernarvon Township (Berks County) Board of Supervisors.

Pennwood: Traditional Plan
This plan was prepared by TCA. It was accepted in a Settlement to litigation, by the Caernarvon Township Board of Supervisors in 1994.
Article VII-A-TND:
The Comitta Experience:

- Enacted August 2000 as an MPC Amendment
- 1991 Uwchlan Township (Eagleview)
- 1995 West Chester Borough TND Ordinance
- 2000 Doylestown Borough (Lantern Hill)
- 2002 Londonderry Township (New Daleville)
- 2004 West Bradford Township (Marshalton)
- 2005 Catasaqua (Ironworks)
- 2007 Media Borough (Baltimore Avenue)
- 2008 Cranberry Township (TND-1, 2, 3)
- 2008 Gettysburg Township (Streetscape)
- 2008 Charlestown Township (Spring Oak)
- 2010 Ferguson Township (Pine Hall)

Notes:

1. The MPC has a TND photo on the cover!
2. Comitta assisted State Representative Robert L. Freeman (136th District), with Section 708-A.
**Key Design Elements: Traditional Towns and Traditional Neighborhoods**

Unlike conventional suburban development patterns (with separated land uses, deep setbacks, no on-street parking, cul-de-sacs, and no sidewalks), Traditional Towns and Traditional Neighborhoods promote more compact, walkable, mixed-use, interconnected and sustainable communities, and have the following Key Design Elements:

- **“Anchor” for the Neighborhood:** features a Green, Park, Corner Store, Post Office, Library, Town Hall, Community Center, Train Station, Theatre, or other Civic Use; enjoys success along a 3 to 5 block long “main street” or in a neighborhood or town center; provides a place for special events.

- **Service Area and Size:** features a ¼ to ½ mile (5 to 10 minute walk) from the Neighborhood Center to the edge; creates a range of 40 to 160 acres for each neighborhood.

- **Mix of Uses:** combines Residential, Commercial, Institutional, Limited Industrial, Recreational and Open Space uses in a diversified but seamless arrangement; also combines first floor retail with second floor apartments and/or offices in the town/neighborhood center; encourages live-work units and granny flats as Accessory Dwelling Units.

- **Network System of Interconnected Streets:** organizes a block and pattern of lots; integrates boulevards, avenues, neighborhood streets, and alleys; links to pedestrian and other motorized and non-motorized transportation systems; streets and street walls help to create outdoor rooms and the streetscape; street vistas terminate with public space, landmark structures or civic buildings.

- **On-Street/Parallel Parking:** provides a separator between vehicular and pedestrian traffic; utilizes cartway as an “aisle”; (with “overflow” parking to the rear or side of buildings); promotes effective “traffic calming” by slowing down the speed of vehicles, especially along narrower streets.

- **Streetscape:** promotes human scale relationship for the pedestrian as part of the public realm; an “outdoor room” type of space created by 2 to 5 story buildings, located (in the most compact part of the Transect) in the range of 60 to 85 feet across from one another on both sides of the street; buildings at a “build-to” line create a Street Wall (which may have up to a 4 to 8 foot offset).

- **Lanes (Alleys):** allows for preservation of frontage streetscape; provides vehicular access to parking in the rear; provides opportunities for rear access to an accessory apartment (granny flats), or for deliveries; provides access for utilities and staging construction.

- **Sidewalks/Crosswalks/Pedestrian Paths/Walkways:** serve to link uses, buildings, lots and streets together; accommodates a healthy pedestrian circulation network; provides close to home opportunities for exercise; enhances wayfinding and an appreciation of the neighborhood place.

- **Building Types:** focuses on buildings designed by type, not solely by function, to allow for adaptations and changes in use (e.g. from dwelling, to shop, to work place, to civic use); most appropriate when an expression of regional/local context and style.

- **Porch/Portico/Colonnade:** serves as transition element from the private realm of the building to public realm of the sidewalk and street; provides shade; promotes a finer, more ornamental “texture” of the building; creates a cozy space to sit, walk, relax; provides the outdoor room for greeting and socializing with neighbors and friends.

- **Shade Trees:** provide (as street trees) the canopy/overhead plane to help create an “outdoor room”; and (as shade trees) provides an “old shade” character of the neighborhood.

- **Other Vertical Infrastructure:** includes Civic Art such as gateways, monuments, gazebos, pavilions, pergolas, as well as walls, fences, trees, hedges, street lamps, benches, or like features.

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**Key Design Elements: Traditional Towns and Traditional Neighborhoods**

**Park, Open Space, Countryside:** creates the green, square or park to enhance and beautify the Town/Neighborhood Center and neighborhood; a system of “green spaces” ecologically balanced with the built environment and distributed within the community; includes a “green edge” of open space to help shape neighborhoods and towns; forms the countryside between towns, villages, and other places.

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Traditionally, the neighborhood development is in the form of a public park, commons, plaza, square or prominent intersection of two or more major streets.

Generally, there is a hierarchy of streets laid out in a network pattern of interconnected streets and blocks that provides multiple routes from origins to destinations and are appropriately designed to serve the needs of pedestrians and vehicles equally.
Chapter 18 addresses: “A range of parks, from tot lots and village greens to ballfields and community gardens, should be distributed within neighborhoods. Conservation areas and open lands should be used to define and connect different neighborhoods and districts.”

Last Harvest, Scribner, 2007
This book tells the story of New Daleville, a TND in western Chester County
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**Lantern Hill**
A Traditional Neighborhood Development
Doylestown, PA
(Town Planning and Design Services)

In the capacity of Town Planning Consultant to Doylestown Borough, Bucks County, PA, TCA also served as a Mediator. We worked with the Borough, Developer and neighbors, prepared a refined Site Plan, and drafted the TND-1 Zoning Ordinance to enable Lantern Hill.

Lantern Hill, a TND on 19 acres, has 117 homes and 72,000 square feet of office and retail units. This TND is located at Broad Street and Veterans Lane.

The Lantern Hill TND is distinguished due to:
- An interconnected network of streets, sidewalks and paths;
- Building types emblematic of Doylestown Borough;
- Great curb appeal of homes, due to rear alley garages;
- A mix of dwelling unit types; and
- Greens and neighborhood open space.

**NEW DALEVILLE**
A Traditional Neighborhood Development
Daleville, Pennsylvania
(Town Planning and Design Services)

TCA assisted Londonderry Township and Arcadia Land Company to prepare the TND Ordinance that was adopted in October 2003. The proposed neighborhood with 125 homes and 12,000 square feet of commercial use is an extension of the rural center of Daleville. This TND, located at the intersection of PA Routes 926 and 796 will have over 50% common open space.

The New Daleville TND will feature:
- A compact, walkable, mixed-use community;
- A neighborhood commercial component adjoining active recreational areas;
- A streetscape accented by front porches; and
- Green courts as a civic and neighborhood amenity.
Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) Districts
Charlestown Township - Chester, Pennsylvania

The TND Districts of Charlestown Township are intended to:

- Comply with Article VII-A, Traditional Neighborhood Development, of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC);
- Promote “Placemaking” to create a more functional and attractive Neighborhood Structure in the Devault area;
- Build Compact, Mixed-Use, Pedestrian-Oriented, and Sustainable Neighborhoods in the five (5) TND Districts (TND-1 through TND-5); and
- Require a Manual of Written & Graphic Design Guidelines to provide quality control in the construction of the TNDs.

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The TND Districts in Cranberry Township are intended to:

- Comply with Article VII-A, Traditional Neighborhood Development of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code;
- Promote “Placemaking” to create a more functional and attractive Neighborhood Structure; and
- Build Compact, Mixed-Use, Pedestrian-Oriented, and Sustainable Neighborhoods.

The proposed TND Street Network is intended to be guided by Street Sections for:

- Boulevards, Avenues, Parkways;
- Main Streets, with On-Street Parking;
- Neighborhood Streets; and
- Alleys & Service Lanes.
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**Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) Ordinance**
Cranberry Township - Butler, Pennsylvania

The Cranberry Township TND Ordinance utilized Two-Story Commercial Building-Type Precedents for store types such as:

- Hardware Stores;
- Clothing Stores;
- Drug Stores;
- Banks; and
- Live-Work Units

The Two-Story Building Types provide better scale and stature along the Streetscape of TND Streets.

Form Based Code Workshops

TCA was retained by the PA Department of Community and Economic Development and the Pennsylvania Association of Township Supervisors to conduct Form-Based Code (FBC) Workshops in six (6) places in Pennsylvania, including:

1. Gettysburg;
2. State College;
3. Bethlehem;
4. Media;
5. Greensburg; and

Over 150 persons participated in all-day sessions focused on:

- FBC evolution and history;
- FBC examples;
- Measurements & Metrics;
- Definitions;
- Street Sections;
- Public Spaces;
- Building & Parking Placement;
- Code Amendments; and
- Code Enforcement.
The Pine Hall Development Corporation (PHDC) retained TCA to prepare the General Master Plan and Design Manual for Pine Hall, a TTD - Traditional Town Development in State College, PA. Pine Hall is proposed to be a compact, mixed-use, walkable neighborhood with a diversity of opportunities to live, work, shop, and play. PHDC received General Master Plan approval on February 1, 2010.
Pine Hall will feature a rich diversity of public space, and a wide variety of building and dwelling units. The General Master Plan will be transformed into Specific Implementation Plans for each of seven (7) phases.
Pine Hall will have a hierarchy of street types and alleys emanating from Old Gatesburg Road, a Boulevard street.
The City of St. Paul retained URS and TCA to prepare Zoning Amendments for six (6) Brownfield Sites along the Mississippi River.

Previously Zoned Industrial, the properties were rezoned to have an Urban Village Overlay. Each Urban Village shall achieve the form of a Traditional Neighborhood emblematic of the many traditional neighborhoods of the City of St. Paul.

The first three (3) urban infill projects have utilized the TN-3 Overlay District Zoning.

As of 2009, 3 of the 6 Urban Villages have been successfully built at:

+ Upper Landing;
+ Wacouta Commons; and
+ Emerald Gardens/ Metro Lofts.

These Urban Villages exhibit the key design elements set forth in the Code including:

• Traditional Streetscapes;
• Build-To Lines;
• Ground Floor Commercial Use;
• Minimum Building Heights;
• Civic Spaces; and
• Pedestrian Amenities.

The other three (3) sites are “on the drawing board.”
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CORNER STORE
A Key Design Element in Traditional Neighborhood Development

The Corner Store provides opportunities for:
- Anchoring a TND;
- Mixed-use development;
- Offices, or apartments, above commercial;
- Live-Work units; and
- Small-scale shopping within walking distance.

The Corner Store has the following attributes:
- Is along a main or frontage street;
- Is typically in the range of 850 to 1,500 square feet on the ground floor;
- Is a building type similar in scale and height to adjoining businesses or residences;
- Is located next to the sidewalk; and
- Has parking on-street, and to the rear.

Prepared by:
Thomas Comitta Associates, Inc.
Town Planners & Landscape Architects
February, 2004

The next time that Walmart or Target come to town, ask them to “tHink smallmart.” Large scale retail units can be sized and positioned to create attractive and desirable “Main Street Environments.”

“Main Street Environments” are typically formed by the placement of Street Walls on both sides of a street, approximately 60 to 85 feet apart.

Square footages in the range of 50,000 to 65,000 square feet on the ground floor can be positioned in an urban context, without being offensive or ugly.

We can add value to a Town or Neighborhood and respect local character. The large scale retail building type can be edged with Liner Shops.