



Build Cities Around Places?

From *Making Places*, the news from Project for Public Spaces

One of the joys for all of us working at PPS is learning from people all around the world about how they'd like to make their communities better. No two answers are the same, but listen long enough and the degree to which people share similar desires is remarkable. "Downtown would be a better place if I felt comfortable walking there" is a common sentiment. Or we'll often hear someone tell us, "There should be a place close to home where I can take my kids to play." Though the specifics vary, a steady current runs beneath the surface of what people say. It's the same desire for shared, public places that has shaped human settlements since the first cities were built.



The architect and author Christopher Alexander coined a phrase (and authored a book by the same name), "The Timeless Way of Building," that touches on these common yearnings and how people have intuitively used them to build congenial places to live. The process of building cities today has become so institutionalized, however, that people seldom have an outlet to put their intuition to use anymore. At PPS, we believe this timeless way of building can be reinvigorated, and we offer a common-sense way to do it: by empowering people to initiate improvements to their local neighborhoods place by place. These small steps to enliven streets, parks, and other public spaces are the building blocks of a thriving city.

That is the idea at the heart of PPS's newly launched Great Cities Initiative (more on that below). The vitality of any city depends on citizen action such as neighborhood groups reclaiming their local parks and small businesses recharging commercial streets. Many times, communities need just a little nudge in the right direction to set this process of revitalization in motion. And in a short



The Path to Simplicity

For some of us, the path to simplicity has already begun. Many of us feel that commuting by bike or by foot saves time, money, and precious resources. I've had conversations with many of you about how this choice has changed your life and your perspective on how to live. As gas prices soar and work hours lengthen, I've found that the need to simplify is expressed more often. Some people talk of the need to reduce or manage stress, others lament the decline in air quality. Some would like to spend less money or simply consume with integrity.

Beginning in December, the OHSU Bike Commuters Group will sponsor a series of sessions on Voluntary Simplicity moderated and taught by a volunteer from the Northwest Earth Institute. The 8 sessions are free, but they use a text that costs \$15. The first session is an introduction, so stop by to find out what VS is all about and see if it can help you simplify the way you handle your relationships with money, time, people, and the environment. The first session will be held from noon until 1:00 pm on December 9 in the Child Development Research Center, room 3200. Descriptions of each session are on Page 2. For more information, write to bike@ohsu.edu. For more information on the Northwest Earth Institute, visit their website at: <http://www.nwei.org/>

time, the entire neighborhood has undergone a turnaround as residents take comfort and pride in their public spaces.

What sort of "nudge" are we talking about? Imagine, for example, a neighborhood park bordered on one side by a commercial street and on another by a public library. These urban elements work together to form a single place, yet in a typical city that area would likely be managed by a number of public entities, each operating independently of the others. Instead of a unified approach to improving the place, we likely end up with atomized spheres of influence. The Department of Transportation promotes fast traffic on the roadway with little concern for pedestrians, park users, or patrons of local businesses. Park officials don't factor in library patrons or local shoppers when programming activities. You wind up with a park without popular activities, a street where people don't feel comfortable walking to the park or library, and local institutions cut off from the surrounding neighborhood.

A Public Safety Alert

Public Safety dispatch is getting frequent complaints about bicyclists who insist on riding up Sam Jackson Park Road. There is no excuse for this considering two alternative routes exist along Terwilliger. There you will find a bike lane and a multi-use path that is open to bicyclists. Yes, the closure of Campus Drive is inconvenient, but patients and delivery vehicles not familiar with that route tend to try to swing wide to pass the slower bicyclists not realizing that this could put them in the way of large vehicles such as buses, trucks, and ambulances coming downhill. As the weather begins to include fog and the potential for ice and snow, it is better to not take the risk. If you aren't familiar with the suggested routes, please contact the Bike Group, info below.



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But if we look upon these elements as interrelated components of a single place, we create more opportunities for local people to collaborate and jointly create a vision of what's best for the community. How can the street, park, library, and businesses support and strengthen each other? What do business owners, library employees, and nearby residents envision for the area? By simply observing and listening to the people who live or work or play in the area, the solution to what the place needs will become apparent.

Every day, PPS puts these ideas into practice in the cities, towns, and regions where we work. In order for this approach, which we call "Placemaking," to be effective, we've found that professional planners, designers, and engineers first need to move beyond the habit of looking at and shaping cities through the lens of single goals or professional disciplines. Only by adopting a more holistic view can we say goodbye to streets dominated by traffic, parks little-used by local residents, and public institutions and redevelopment projects isolated from local communities. The Great Cities Initiative provides a unique framework for professionals from different disciplines to collaborate effectively and for citizens to take part in creating the neighborhoods they desire.

The time is ripe for a bold idea like the Great Cities Initiative. As we've seen, towns and cities are already forging ahead with innovative partnerships and a sharpened focus on how to involve local communities in the process of revitalization. Applied throughout a city or region, PPS's Placemaking techniques can bring immense positive change to neighborhoods and public spaces, creating the kind of vital public life and community energy that has always been the most compelling reason people choose to live in cities. *To read the full article and learn more about PPS, click [HERE](#).*

Voluntary Simplicity Schedule

Dec 9 - Course Introduction: Introduction of Voluntary Simplicity and distribution of books. The course is free and the book is \$15. **CDRC 3200**

Dec 16 - The Meaning of Simplicity: The concept of simplicity, as a religious practice or philosophy of life, has a long history. Inner simplicity and outer simplicity are both involved. What are some common misconceptions about a simple life? **CDRC 3220**

Jan 6 - Living More with Less: Accumulating material possessions is part of the American Dream. For some, the dream has become a nightmare. When do material possessions add meaning to our lives and when do they detract? **CDRC 3200**

Jan 13 - Your Money or Your Life: A growing number of people wish to resolve the conflict between the desire to make and spend money and the desire for a simple life. Why is that so difficult in our culture? **CDRC 3200**

Jan 20 - Do You Have the Time?: In modern society, our minds are focused on the "busyness" of the day, our current problems, and our future challenges. Are there alternatives to the fast pace of mainstream culture? **CDRC 3200**

Jan 27 - How Much Is Enough?: As a society, we engage in patterns of material consumption that are damaging the environment. How much do we *really* need? **CDRC 3200**

Feb 3 - Swimming Against the Tide: Our country's current guiding economic principles push growth, consumption, and technological advance as inextricable and desirable goals. In our efforts to live simply, we may feel like we are swimming against the tide. **CDRC 3200**

Feb 10 - The Practice of Simplicity: There are countless practical benefits in moving toward simplicity. What steps can be taken to move toward a life *simple in means, rich in ends*? **CDRC 3200**

BIKE TO WORK!



The Bike Commuter Group (BCG) promotes bicycling as a healthy mode of transportation that benefits individuals and the environment. For more information about the BCG or to find ways to get involved, contact us at bike@ohsu.edu or visit our website at www.ohsu.edu/bike/.