

12-15-2007

The Village of River Ranch: A Post Occupancy Evaluation of a Traditional Neighborhood Development in Lafayette, Louisiana

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The Village of River Ranch: A Post Occupancy Evaluation of a Traditional Neighborhood
Development in Lafayette, Louisiana

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Science
in
Urban Studies

by

Elizabeth A. Tomlinson

B.A. Southeastern Louisiana University, 1989
B.I.D. Louisiana State University, 2000

December, 2007

for John, for everything.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Thanks are due to many. To Renia Ehrenfeucht for guidance and sound advice; to Jane Brooks for her belief, support, and encouragement (and humor!); to David Gladstone for his advice and leadership of the MSUS program; to Evan Zucker of Loyola University for his suggestions, willingness to traipse across town for meetings at UNO, and for his more than generous aid regarding my course at LSU; and to David Lambour for keeping me on track, always good naturedly.

Gratitude is also due Frances Prejean of River Ranch Development. Her unfailing and generous assistance were critical to this research. And to Robert Daigle and River Ranch Development for opening its doors to me. Steven Oubre, architect and planner of River Ranch, provided me with critical documents and was always available to answer questions no matter how busy. His help is greatly appreciated. I'd also like to thank all of the residents of River Ranch who supported me in this project and welcomed me into their homes.

Julia Hiatt and Michael Williams deserve huge thanks for providing housing and humor during my many trips to Lafayette, as well as insight into the community.

And to my family and friends, especially my husband, John ("Husband of the Year" 11 years running!) who have supported me through the years and in this project. I am eternally grateful.

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ABSTRACT

The proponents of New Urbanism claim the neighborhoods they design, called Traditional Neighborhood Developments (TNDs), promote community, sense of place, physical health, and environmental sustainability. Critics assert that community is stressed at the expense of individuality, that design unity has become rigid uniformity, and that the neighborhoods are orchestrated and do not reflect real life.

This thesis, a post occupancy evaluation (POE), examines how one TND works for its residents and whether it accomplishes the goals of the architect/planner. An additional, essential purpose of this POE is to serve the “feed-forward” role of informing future neighborhood planning projects. The Village of River Ranch in Lafayette, Louisiana is the site of my research.

Utilization of multiple research methods (survey, interviews, naturalistic observations) offered opportunities for triangulation and the ability to produce a more comprehensive analysis.

Keywords: New Urbanism, Traditional Neighborhood Development, neighborhood planning, post occupancy evaluation, the Village of River Ranch, Louisiana

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Problem

The architect, Christopher Alexander is purported to have said that he asks himself one question when he enters a space: “does this place raise one’s spirits or lower them” (Moffet 2004:76). This could be said to be the underlying question behind the study of environmental psychology. In studying environment and behavior, we want to know ‘how does this place make us feel’ or ‘what behaviors does this place engender?’ A key tool in environmental psychology is the post occupancy evaluation or POE.

The POE, conducted at the neighborhood scale, can be a powerful tool for planners and architects. More post occupancy evaluations of the new neighborhood models based on New Urbanist principles need to be performed to find out if they work for their residents, if they accomplish the goals of the architect or planner, and to develop lessons learned for future design.

To this end, this thesis will be a post occupancy evaluation of the Village of River Ranch, a neotraditional neighborhood located in Lafayette, Louisiana and the first Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) to appear in Louisiana. Gifford maintains that “one of the most fundamental findings in environmental psychology: the perceived value of a setting often depends on the evaluator’s relation to the [setting]” (2002:495). That is, we must know who is doing the evaluation and what their relationship to the setting is in order to understand the evaluation. The architect will have a different assessment than will the developer than will the builder than will the resident and so on.

In order to get to the truth behind the discourse on TNDs, we must ask the people who live there, for it is their beliefs, supported by actions and behavior, which will tell us whether or not the TND concept works as a livable neighborhood. By learning what works and what doesn’t, architects and planners can use this information in a feed-forward role.

The proponents of New Urbanism claim that the neighborhoods they design promote community, sense of place, physical health, and environmental sustainability. Critics assert that community is stressed at the expense of individuality, that design unity has become rigid uniformity, and that the neighborhoods are “Disneyesque” and do not reflect real life. As Dunham-Jones reports, New Urbanism is “bashed from the left as conservative nostalgia and bashed from the right as liberal social engineering” (2000:26).

Out of the principles of New Urbanism came the formula for developing neotraditional neighborhoods, spelled out in the TND Checklist in Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck's *Suburban Nation* (2000). Despite criticism from architects and planners, the principles of New Urbanism and the TND have gained momentum and popularity since the early nineties in the United States. Arguments for and against neotraditional neighborhoods seem to be more philosophical, rather than based on findings from any extensive bank of qualitative research.

In conducting my post-occupancy evaluation of River Ranch, I used a combination of formal and informal interviews, naturalistic observations, observations of behavior traces, and analysis of archival data to determine the emic reality of the phenomenon for the residents, as well as the value of the architect's achieved goals. This multimodal approach was chosen to provide hard data to address the issues in the planning and development discourse, while providing no impressionistic claims to undermine the research. Almost ten years after the first residents moved into River Ranch, their thoughts, feelings and behaviors regarding life in the neighborhood were interrogated and analyzed to better inform policy, planning, and design.

While this POE attempts to answer the questions regarding the success of TNDs as habitable environments, the main purpose is to serve the feed-forward role of informing future neighborhood planning projects, one of the goals of environmental psychology. As Clovis Heimsath says: "as on other frontiers today, perhaps the way forward is a reevaluation of what is past" (1977:179).

Purpose of This Research

- To examine the structure of the experience for those who live in River Ranch.
- To explore how the architect's goals for the development are or are not realized.
- To compare the architect's goals for the development with the actual behavior and expressed perceptions of the residents.
- To inform future neighborhood planning projects by revealing any disconnects between the architectural programming, implementation, and actual effectiveness of the TND for human users (Gifford 2002:491).

Methodology

The purpose of this research is to study and analyze the behavior and the structure of the experience for those who live in the Village of River Ranch. In addition, it is to determine how or if the architectural programming plays a part in this experience. I organized this evaluation

around four key issues: the degree of implementation of the architect's goals; the relationship between the residents' behavior and the intent of the goals (or the transactions between the residents and the setting); the people's assessments of the goals and degree of implementation; and the resident's overall satisfaction level and responses to particular features.

This ethnographic knowledge will reveal the nature of the livability and habitability of neighborhoods built around the tenets and principles of New Urbanism with implications for future neighborhood planning efforts. The methods entailed enabled detailed information to be collected regarding the quality of the experience and the "mutual interactions between the residents and the physical environment" (Churchman and Ginosar 1999:267).

Evaluation research tests how well a particular space works after it has been occupied. For this case study, I adapted the Rapid Ethnographic Assessment Procedure method as described by Low et al., in which "a number of methods are selected to produce different types of data from diverse sources that can be triangulated to provide a comprehensive analysis of the site" (2005:188). Like a diagnostic POE, this multi-method strategy is oriented for the long-term, "aiming to improve not only a particular [facility], but also the state of the art in a given [building] type" (Preiser et al. 1988: 57).

As an ethnographic study, this research, almost by definition, must be conducted according to qualitative research methods and procedures. As Churchman and Ginosar tell us "the use of diverse research methods, which aim at reaching different types of information, and offer the possibility of triangulation between the findings of the different methods, enables the building of a complex, multidimensional picture of the condition of the neighborhood, and assists in identifying problems which require planning intervention" (1999:275). To this end, the qualitative research design consisted of interviews, surveys, naturalistic observations, observations of behavior traces, behavioral mapping, and analysis of archival data. However, behavior mapping and the survey were eliminated as the mapping proved not to be applicable and the modest survey response made the results unusable.

The initial phase of the research began with the preliminary exploration, which involved the gathering of archival data, and informal interviews and discussions with the architect and a representative of the developer to contribute to my understanding of the neighborhood's origin, history, and the planners' goals and philosophies behind their design decisions. Detailed plans,

renderings, brochures, and newspaper articles were acquired from the architect, landscape architect, developer, and through internet and physical library archival research.

The study area included offices, retail, apartments, lofts, live-work units, townhouses and various sizes of detached single houses. The area is bordered by Camellia Boulevard to the east, Settlers Trace Boulevard to the south, the houses fronting Worth Avenue to the west, and the lakes to the north. (Ordinal directions are approximate.) Interviews were drawn from the entire developed and inhabited site. Fieldwork took place in the spring and summer of 2007.

My primary methods of data collection included the interview and naturalistic observations. I conducted detailed interviews ranging from thirty minutes to two hours in length (see Appendix B for a list of interview questions). The interviews were taped and analyzed from the tapes. They were not transcribed.

As with all qualitative research, participant selection depends upon the participant's agreement to be part of the study. For this inquiry, I obtained respondents from all housing types and sizes and from all areas of the development in order to decrease any distortion based on homogeneity.

Initial subject selection involved cold approach of residents in public spaces. I first determined whether the person I approached was indeed a resident of River Ranch. I then explained my project and asked if the individual would be willing to sit for an interview. Interviews were then scheduled with willing participants at their convenience. Seventeen interviews were obtained in this manner.

Once inquiry began, "snowball sampling" was utilized to add to the sample group. From the 17 subjects interviewed, 18 residents were referred. Fifteen interviews were obtained from these referrals. Two subjects noted a willingness to be interviewed on the survey (which was deleted from the research design), which completed the sample group.

I conducted thirty-four interviews with participants representing all housing types, coming from both sides of Camellia Boulevard, and representing eight of the ten neighborhoods within River Ranch. The interviewees' length of time in residence in River Ranch ranged from two weeks to eight years. Three subjects had been there since the beginning, nine moved in between 2000 and 2004, nine came in 2005 alone (some as a result of Hurricane Katrina), five in 2006, and three this year.

Twenty-six were married and eight were single. Four couples were interviewed together, as well as a group of three seniors. All others were interviewed individually. Seventy-nine percent of respondents were female and twenty-one percent male. Twenty-five owned their residences and nine rented. Five couples had changed residences within River Ranch two or more times as their family needs or personal preferences changed. Two were currently relocating to another area of the village and two were moving out of River Ranch. Eighty-five percent of those interviewed were Caucasian and fifteen percent represented other races or ethnicities (see Figure 1.1). Three interviewees reported husbands who were non-Caucasian. Further demographic information on the subjects can be seen in the charts below (Figures 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4).

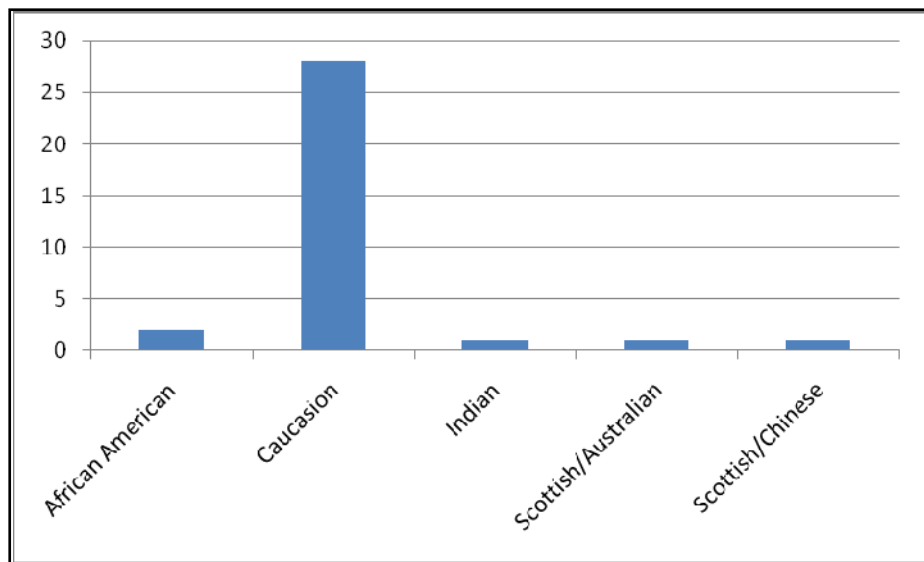


Figure 1.1: Racial/ethnicity distribution of interview subjects.

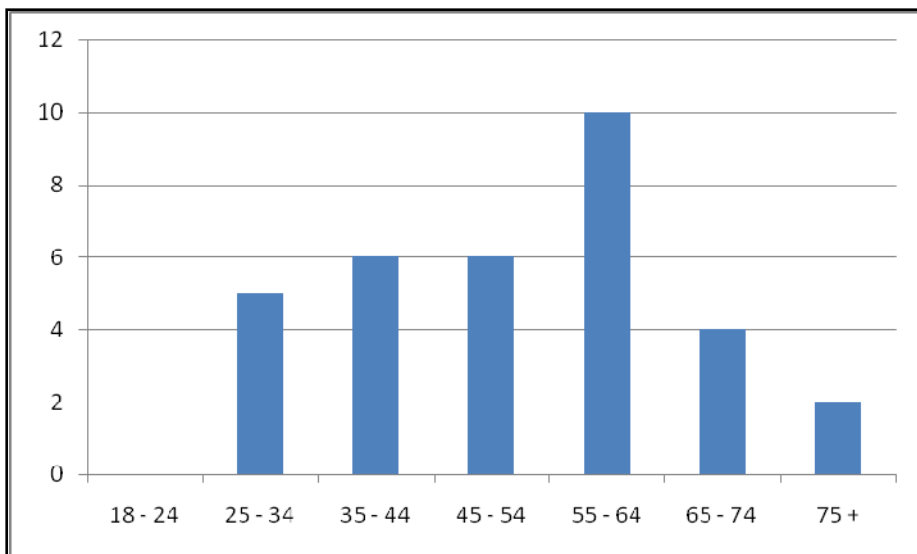


Figure 1.2: Age range of interview subjects.

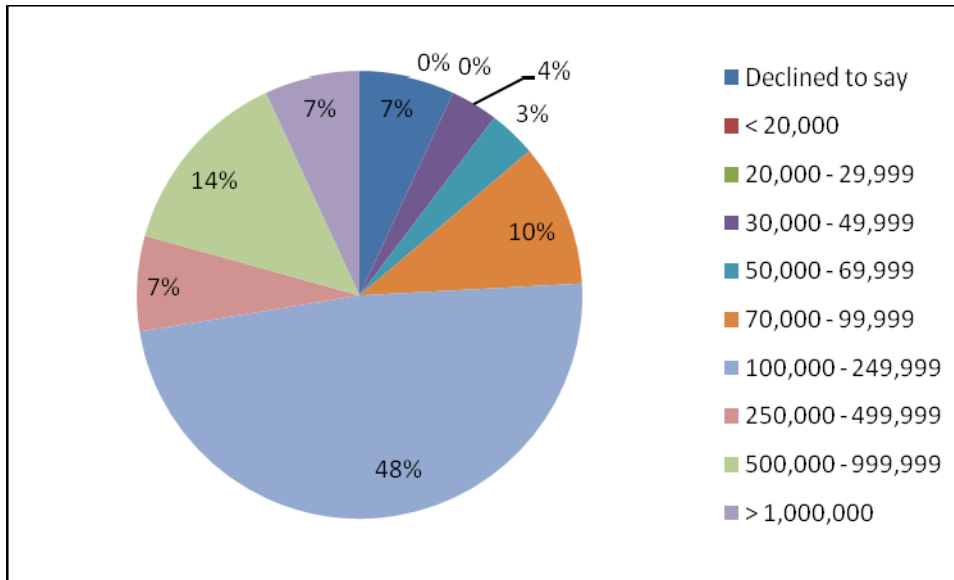


Figure 1.3: Subjects' reported annual family income in U.S. dollars.

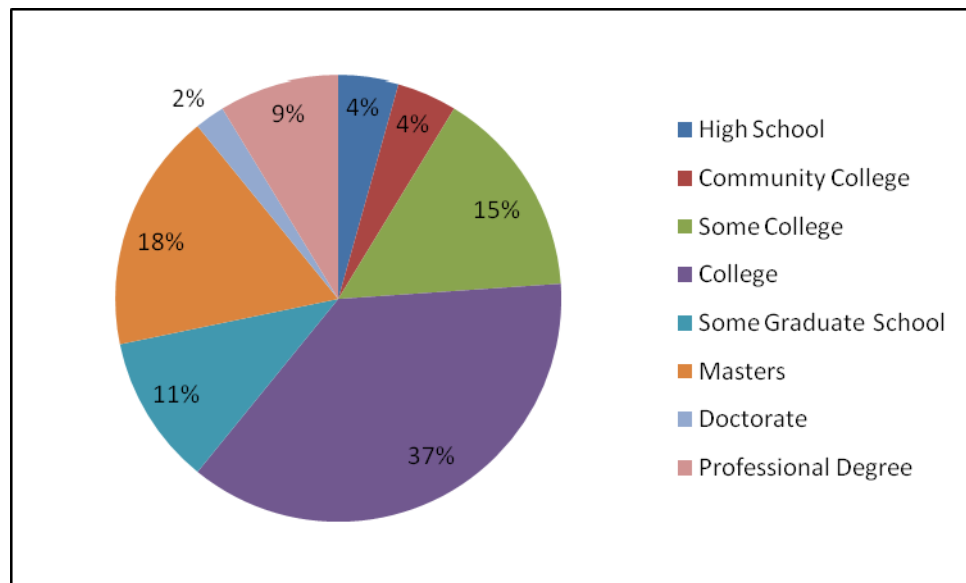


Figure 1.4: Subjects' reported highest level of education completed.
(Note: Spouses education levels included.)

I began the interviews by establishing context for the subject's perspective through inquiry into the customary life of the subject, that is, the subject's ordinary life and activities on an average day. The 'who,' 'what,' 'how,' and 'why' that Marans tells us are revealed in surveys, are also useful in the interview. The 'who' is the demographic information that will help me describe the population. The 'how' and 'what' "deal with people's thoughts and feelings, their behaviors, and their understanding and awareness of situations and places"

(Marans 1987:44). I utilized these who, what, how, and why questions in order to understand the relationship between the resident and the neighborhood environment. Residents were queried on their perceptions of the architect's goals, their overall satisfaction level, their likes and dislikes, and the utilization of the neighborhood amenities.

Naturalistic observations helped to provide context, perspective, and understanding of the data reported by the participants in the study. As Phillippe Boudon found, in conducting an evaluation of Le Corbusier's *Quartiers Modernes Frugés* in Pessac, "we have seen on numerous occasions that there was often a marked discrepancy between the statements made by the occupants and their actions" (1969:162). Bell et al. assert the importance of this research technique, saying "since environmental effects on behavior are important [in environmental psychology], much of our research should involve naturalistic studies of behavior in the built and natural environment." He continues to explain that behaviors are meaningful only with an understanding of the context in which they occur (2001:6).

Naturalistic observation involves "the systematic noting and recording of events, behaviors, and artifacts (objects) in the social setting chosen for study" (Marshall and Rossman 2006:98). Observations can be formal, with a designated place, time, and checklist, or more informal. They can include your personal thoughts, but only after "detailed, nonjudgmental, and concrete descriptions of what has been observed" are recorded (Marshall and Rossman 2006:98). Again, the ability to triangulate through multiple methods is imperative to providing the most accurate picture of the phenomenon being studied.

Environment and behavior research consists of two types of behavior to be observed: molar and molecular. As molecular deals with micro-behaviors such as facial expressions, it is the molar behaviors that deal with larger units of behavior that will be examined in this study during observations (Bechtel and Zeisel 1987:12). Pilot tests of the observation procedure were performed before scheduled observations began in April to detect any unforeseen challenges and adaptations that needed to be made. Observation categories were based on the principles of the TND design and the information interrogated in the interviews.

Notations of behavior traces supplemented and reinforced the findings from the other research methods. Behavioral traces are physical signs left behind after human occupancy that give clues to the behaviors that occur there. They are divided into four categories: "by-products of use (erosion, leftovers); adaptations of use (additions or repairs); displays of self (decorative

lettering on mailboxes, display of personal items); and public messages (official signs, public bulletin boards, graffiti)” (Bechtel and Zeisel 1987:32). Traces can be unconsciously left behind as in the by-products of use, or more consciously created as in the other three categories (Zeisel 1981:89).

I conducted 49 formal observations and several informal observations in eleven locations within my observation study area. The observation area included 200 single family homes and lots, 13 of which were under construction, 6 for sale, and 11 were empty lots. It also included retail, offices, restaurants, parks, apartments and the Carriage House Condos and Townhomes. At the time of the observations, the Carriage House was still under construction.

These observations took place in 2 ½ days in April and again over a two-week period (14 days) at the end of May 2007. (See Appendix C for schedule of observations.) It should be noted that school is still in session at this time. These observations were used to generate additional questions for my interviews. They also served to help verify what was learned in the interviews, as it is common for people to be inaccurate in their self-reporting, not necessarily consciously.

Each observation ranged from one to three hours in length, with the majority being one to two hour stints. I observed each place at different times and on different days of the week. The time period covered began as early as 5:30 a.m. and ended as late as 9:00 p.m. The observation locations were: The Village Market; Café Roma; CC’s Community Coffee House; Scoops Ice Cream shop; Ellington Park; Windsor Park; the Winslow, Arabella, and Ellendale Boulevard parks; Bradbury Crossing Park, Preservation Park, and the Town Square. In addition, to get a more comprehensive view of activity in the neighborhood, I walked my research area in one-hour blocks of time at different times of the day and on different days of the week. One hour equaled two circuits of the area.

Although bounded temporally and in context specific to the Village of River Ranch, this research addresses issues currently being debated in design and planning circles and will be transferable to other contexts. This research can be applied and may be useful in effecting future policy, planning, and design.

Feasibility and Limitations

One of the challenges facing researchers using naturalistic observation is the risk of the Hawthorne effect coming into play. The Hawthorne effect refers to the effect that occurs when a subject knows that he is being watched. The reciprocal nature of human interaction demands that

one's behavior will affect in some way the behavior of another, and that the other's behavior will in fact affect the first individual. Churchman and Ginosar maintain that

one cannot separate the researcher from that which he/she researches. They interact with one another, and through this interaction, affect one another. The act of research changes and shapes the phenomenon being studied, and this in turn shapes the research (1999:272).

There are, however, inherent privacy rights of the individual that ethically demand that the researcher obtains prior informed consent of the subject before observation. This, of course, can increase the Hawthorne effect. The accepted solution to this conflict is to observe only public behavior without consent, thereby avoiding any privacy right violations (Bechtel and Zeisel 1987:37).

The reciprocal nature of human interaction leads to another possible limitation. Given that "reality is a construct in the brain of the individual," the researcher must be aware that her perceptions of an event or an environment will be biased by her personal experience (Churchman and Ginosar 1999:272). The case study method applied in this research for the post occupancy evaluation is intended to limit this bias by adopting a range of research methodologies to strengthen the credibility of any findings and to avoid distortion of events that may unconsciously occur due to the researcher's own perceptions.

Although each research method has its own limitations, any finding revealed by two of more of them reinforces credibility and decreases the chance of distortion. In addition, a thorough literature review can provide support and validation of analyses of the author. Peer critique will also help in limiting bias. In the end, though, "non-naïve realism recognizes that understanding is relative and there are multiple understandings and that at best, we present a report that is likely to be true given our existing knowledge" (Marshall and Rossman 2006:205). Marshall and Rossman offer further pragmatism by quoting Smith and Deemer: "we must . . . abandon hope for knowledge that is not embedded with our historical, cultural, and engendered ways of being" (2006:205).

Another possible limitation involves the sample size and participant selection and generalization to other settings. With qualitative research, true random sampling is not always available. For this inquiry, the sample size and participant selection are appropriate to qualitative research. Marshall and Rossman state, "although no qualitative studies are generalizable in the

probabilistic sense, their findings may be transferable” (2006:42). This research is bounded and situated in a specific context, but the results should be transferable and useful for other settings.

Rationale and Significance

The physical environment of the Village of River Ranch and the sociospatial model enacted by its residents creates a specialized opportunity to study and analyze the phenomenon of applied New Urbanist principles in a bounded setting. Examining the structure of the lived experience of the community residents, and comparing their expressed beliefs as well as observed behavior to the theoretical suppositions of new urbanism will help to inform the discourse on design and planning of neighborhood environments, and provide data for future policy, planning, and design decisions. Krumholz and Forester recognize that “there is not physical planning without people planning” (Sies and Silver 1996:469).

Most planners, government officials, and everyday citizens recognize that separation of uses affects quality of life and has negative environmental consequences. While the number of TND proponents has increased, there is still controversy seen in the discourse and literature. Moudon reports that New Urbanism “defines itself as a normative theory,” yet cautions “normative design theories have been notoriously short-lived; since they are based on belief, rather than proof.” She continues “to survive, these theories must ground themselves in substance, and provide the necessary ‘proof of goodness’ – explicit and compelling evidence that their claims will have the intended effect” (2000:38).

In compelling common sense, Moudon writes:

New Urbanism should study its own work, evaluate it critically and establish a baseline from which progress can be measured. People living in New Urbanist communities, as well as those building and managing them can shed light on all sides of the debate: how good are the small lots, the town centers, the alley dwellings? Are residents shedding their cars, children walking to school? How strong are social ties in the community? Both positive and negative answers to these questions need explanation, in order to guide the designers into the next generation of projects (2000:42).

It is just this that I am attempting to do with this study of River Ranch, although this work is only a beginning, an introduction, if you will, to the full story. Informing the design of the future “generation of projects” is perhaps the most effective use of the POE. Boudon tells us: “for the architect, as for the artist, it is not enough to do a thing, he also has to see what he has

done” (1969: 162). Sies and Silver posit that too little focus has been on “the human implications and consequences of various plans, projects, and policies” (1996:471).

Marans and Spreckelmeyer report that increased awareness among planners and policy makers of this concern has prompted many to turn to the POE for the information needed for more humane environmental decision-making, planning, and programming (1981:1).

According to Bell et al., POEs were intended to become a cumulative resource for designers that could be accessed at the start of each new project (2001:393). Sommer in 1972 and Friedman et al. in 1978 both call for data banks of POEs to inform future design and planning projects. Unfortunately, only a few disparate organizations collect case studies and POEs, and their existence is not as widely known by the average planner or designer (Francis 2001:16). In addition, the literature on post occupancy evaluations of neighborhoods is “relatively meager” according to Churchman and Ginosar. They continue: “this has, in turn, led to a dearth of systematic information on which to base the neighborhood planning process” (1999:267). This thesis is intended to add valuable information to the existing body of knowledge.

In addition, many cities around the country are changing their current codes and/or adding TND ordinances based on impressionistic claims. The existence of rigorous research findings regarding the effectiveness of New Urbanism ideals would provide a stronger foundation for making any code changes. As Low et al. reports “William H. Whyte’s seminal work in the 1970s on small urban spaces was so clear and convincing that the city of New York revised its zoning code to reflect most of his recommendation” (2005:195).

Another case for an increase in neighborhood evaluations involves the incorrect labeling of developments as New Urbanist. In ignorance or political exigency, many new codes or ordinances professing to be New Urbanist, are often watered down versions that often create more problems and contribute to the negative discourse. Careful evaluation of developments claiming to be New Urbanist should help to educate the public and the politicians as to the difference between authentic implementations and false representations.

Lastly, as environment and behavior research has had “major impacts on various aspects of improving the quality of the physical environment” and “has led to important national, state, and local policies” it is critical to continue this sort of research and to continue to add to the body

of literature regarding the mutual relations between man and the physical environment (Moore et al. 1985:19).

Review of the Literature

The literature is rich in the area of the history of American city planning and there are several worthwhile tomes, some included in the reference section of this text, that explain in detail the evolution of planning in the United States, the theories of various planning models, and the historical context in which they occur. Such thick description of history is not required for the purpose of this study, but rather a broad overview is presented to aid the reader in understanding where we are today and how we got here.

In the simplest of terms, New Urbanism is said to be the reaction to suburbia and sprawl, and the socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental aspects of their existence. However, what we recognize as suburbia today, is a far cry from the origins of the suburban ideal of late nineteenth century England and northeastern United States. Suburban life of that time was itself seen as a social remedy, a response to the ills of the city and industrialization. Suburbs were meant to be a retreat from the crime and chaos of the city, places to nurture family life.

The earliest planned suburbs included a mix of uses. Development of the suburb in pre-World War II America consisted of “neighborhoods with diverse housing, civic buildings, town centers and dedicated open spaces such as parks and squares” (Dutton 2000:16). It is these early suburbs that are important precedents for New Urbanism. People promoting these new attitudes toward residential environments included Frederick Law Olmstead, Andrew Jackson Downing, and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Antiurban rhetoric contributed to, and even began to dominate, the discourse of cities and town planning in to the early twentieth century. Sociologists such as Emile Durkheim, Georg Simmel, and Louis Wirth, as well as researchers from the Chicago School were concerned with social disorganization, the breakdown of community, and the idea of anomie or social dislocation that were linked with urban life and social fragmentation. Ironically, the term *anomie*, is one that can also be applied to the experience of suburban living in post-World War II America.

In his influential essay, “Urbanism as a Way of Life,” Wirth is concerned about the sociological costs of urban life, the “weakening of bonds of kinship, and the declining social significance of the family, the disappearance of the neighborhood, and the undermining of the traditional basis of social solidarity” (1938:21). It was this sentiment that led planners,

politicians, architects and sociologists to begin to explore the idea of planned communities that would counteract the social degradation associated with urban life.

But despite the negative rhetoric of the Chicago School on urban life, the sociologists of the school believed they could solve the problems they delineated by advocating comprehensive metropolitan planning that encouraged “metropolitan-wide cohesion and toleration by understanding the structure and impact of residential, commercial, and industrial land uses on the metropolitan citizenry, the important links that transportation and communication systems could provide, the need for government intervention in the implementation of educational and social welfare programs within the metropolis, and the importance of civic organizations to create healthy civic identity and responsive communities” (Willow 2003:15).

In Dutton’s *New American Urbanism*, he displays a diagrammatic comparison of a neighborhood unit of the 1927 First Regional Plan of New York with that of the 1999 Traditional Neighborhood Development of Duany Plater-Zyberk (DPZ). The concepts of both are remarkably similar. The 1920s saw such organizations as Lewis Mumford’s Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA) which advocated designing complete settlements. “The emphasis on the interrelationship between human, environment, and process as a basis for planning and design is straight out of the RPAA manifesto” (Dutton 2000:22, 23, 245).

But by Hoover’s 1931 Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership, these new urbanistic principles were already beginning to be diluted and reformulated. The conference endorsed a form of the neighborhood unit, but “stripped of the best.” “The idealism of the planned community, or even the neighborhood unit, gave way to the blatant promotion of property values, racial exclusion, automobile reliance, and middle-class conformity” (Talen 2005: 270). Thus begins the decline of the ideals of the original suburbs and planned communities.

It is the growth of the suburbs of post-war America that has contributed to a significant change in our social and physical landscape. Dutton proposes “antiurban sentiment, as well as, blatant racism, helped propel people from cities to suburbs,” just as it did earlier in the century. For Burgess, it is “[post-World War II] zoning actions that allowed older neighborhoods near the city’s core . . . to become increasingly undesirable, encouraging the departure of those whose income or race gave them other housing options” (1996:238).

Dutton attributes two federal policies in particular for the “rapacious” growth of the suburb: the Federal Highway Act of 1954 and the Federal Housing Authority’s mortgage programs. These two acts, he claims, are what opened suburbia to the middle classes (2000:16). He also recognizes that affordable car ownership contributed to the problem.

Scully also points to the automobile as “the agent of chaos, the breaker of the city.” But this, he posits, is exacerbated by the work of the architects of the International Style. Deriding the modernist theme of individuality, Scully says: “the individual free from history and time. One cannot make a community out of them” (Katz 1994:222-224).

Sommer takes aim at the architecture of the 1960s as well. He admits that there was much excitement over the work of modernists such as Mies van der Rohe, Paul Rudolph, Louis Kahn, and Philip Johnson, but argues that their “reach for the stars” efforts ignored the human condition. “Large segments of the population were finding the work of architects to be irrelevant or hostile to their lives.” Sommer also notes “human scale and neighborhood were neglected” and that “cities were becoming less humane and habitable as their buildings were designed without amenity, integrity, or delight” (1983:2).

Katz takes a more conservative view, declaring that crime and crowding “offered reason enough to leave” the city. The car, he says, just “provided the opportunity to disperse” and suburbia soon became a lifestyle choice for most Americans after the war. But he by no means commends the suburb. Katz acknowledges the breakdown of communal ties, separation, and fragmentation as costs of the suburban migration. He maintains that the costs of suburban sprawl include “the creeping deterioration of once proud neighborhoods, the increasing alienation of large segments of society, a constantly rising crime rate, and widespread environmental degradation” (1994: ix).

Christopher Alexander, in his famous book, *A Pattern Language*, asserts “the suburb is an obsolete and contradictory form of the human settlement” (1977:30.) Dutton alleges that the last half-century of suburbanization has “decimated cities and consumed open land at an unsustainable rate” (2000:11).

So it is with post-World War II suburbia that we see the discourse of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century regarding urban life reasserting its claims of alienation and anomie. Instead of the industrial city being the root of all social and environmental evils, it is now suburbia that prompts such criticism. Critics like Jane Jacobs (1961) and William Whyte (1980)

extol the virtues of city life and denounce suburbia as inauthentic. Claims of placelessness, homogeneity, dehumanization, architectural and social conformity, and exclusion filled the literature and informed the discourse of social commentators such as William Whyte, C. Wright Mills, and David Reisman.

In the following excerpt, Lewis Mumford criticizes the new suburbia in a way that resonates still today:

In the mass movement into suburban areas a new kind of community was produced, which caricatured both the historic city and the archetypal suburban refuge: a multitude of uniform, unidentifiable houses, lined up inflexibly, at uniform distances, on uniform roads, in a treeless communal waste, inhabited by people of the same class, the same income, the same age group, witnessing the same television performances, eating the same tasteless pre-fabricated foods, from the same freezers, conforming in every outward and inward respect to a common mold, manufactured in the central metropolis. Thus, the ultimate effect of the suburban escape in our own time is, ironically, a low-grade uniform environment from which escape is impossible (Willow 2003:18).

While the architects, planners, and social scientists bash suburbia, we are left to wonder what the people who live there think of it. Lansing et al. (1970) compared neighborhood satisfaction levels among six planned suburban communities, two planned inner city communities, and two planned older communities. These neighborhoods were located in Maryland, Virginia, Washington D.C., Michigan, and New Jersey.

The researchers defined fifteen characteristics of a planned community and separated their neighborhood choices into one of three categories for comparison: highly planned, moderately planned, and less planned. Their fifteen characteristics are remarkably similar to the goals of New Urbanism today, with one major exception. While shopping, schools, and other amenities and services are found in these communities, there is no mixing of uses, stating “parcels of land are designated for a single residential use” (Lansing et al. 1970:7-9).

The results of the study found the highly planned communities receiving the highest satisfaction levels. That is, the communities most closely matching all fifteen characteristics (most of which resemble New Urbanist principles) were rated highest by residents for satisfaction level. “In all communities,” Lansing et al. reports, “the item most often mentioned as a source of satisfaction with the community was the nearness or accessibility of work, shopping, and other facilities” (1970:ix, x).

This tells us that suburban residents appreciate the convenience of having non-residential uses nearby, but will this satisfaction translate into the compact, mixed-use developments of the New Urbanist movement?

New Urbanism

So sets the stage for the development of a different form of settlement space that eventually manifests itself in the late 1990s as New Urbanism. “At the start of the 21st century the desire to regenerate rundown, shapeless cities and brownfield sites into livable urban environments has become a major preoccupation for politicians, planners and communities. The compact cities of the past with their walkable and varied streetscapes have become a major influence on people’s thinking” (Girardet 2004:163).

The principles of New Urbanism in America are not new. We have already noted the similarities of the TND (applied New Urbanism) with the 1927 neighborhood unit of New York. The same principles and concepts advocated for sustainable cities in the past are now those adopted by New Urbanists. In her seminal 1961 book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs extols the virtues of numerous, wide sidewalks, mixed uses, small blocks, higher densities, and historical precedence as important for vital, sustainable cities. William Whyte’s Street Life Program, begun in 1971, in which he observed behavior in New York City streets, revealed truisms adopted and manifested today in the TND (1980). And ‘across the pond,’ urban planner Francis Tibbalds promotes mixing uses and activities, human scale, pedestrian freedom, access for all, and sustainability (1992). The New Urbanists drew from these urban principles and translated them to the TND setting, a mix of urban and suburban models.

So while this text utilizes the term New Urbanism, and while this is the nomenclature used in architecture and planning communities today, Dutton states “no one group has the franchise on the goals of finding a balance between the automobile and the pedestrian, private needs and public functions, and the need for architectural expression that will have meaning and resonance for more than half a decade” (2000:9).

Leonardo Benevolo, an architectural historian, asserts that the modern idea of town planning emerged in England as a “corrective intervention” to the industrialization and social disorganization of the city (Dutton 2000:15). It could be said that New Urbanism is its own

corrective intervention to the social displacement, homogeneity, alienation and anomie of the post-World War II suburb.

According to Dutton, New Urbanism represents another effort for architecture and urbanism to “become agents of social change” (2000:11). Just as the ideals of the early suburbs hoped to mitigate the ills of social disorganization of the city and effect social change, so does New Urbanism hope their concepts will best meet the physical and social needs of Americans today, and restore a sense of community they feel has been lost in the last half century. To do this, Dutton states, New Urbanists

envision dense, mixed-use neighborhoods with walkable streets, civic amenities, defined open spaces, and if possible, connections to transit. Regional preservation of open land is enabled by concentration of dense, compact development. Much of the architectural designs are based on local building types and attempts to respect the local ecological conditions (2000:11).

One of the most frequent criticisms of New Urbanism is what is said to be its utopian ideals and nostalgia. New Urbanism does draw on planning ideas of the early twentieth century and on the European urbanism movement of the late 1970s and 1980s, but is this necessarily bad? The literature is filled with references recognizing the importance of looking to the past to better inform the future. Terry Farrell writes, “an understanding of what has succeeded in the past can usefully inform the way we design and manage new, innovative environments” (Tibbalds 1992: preface). From Dutton we get “urban design can and should meet community needs in a way that respects the environment, urban context, and acknowledges the most successful examples of the past” (2000:10). Benton MacKaye tells us “planning is discovery, not invention” (Talen 2005:232). Talen calls our attention to this because of its importance to American urbanism: “it focuses attention on exploration of human settlement rather than exclusively invention” (232). Urban designer Jean-Francois Lejeune claims that “planning’s past can serve as a constructive source for design ideas” and new solutions “can draw judiciously from past theories” (Sies and Silver 1996:468).

Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, two of the several founders of the New Urbanist movement, defend its nostalgia in ways similarly described by Talen and MacKaye:

The fact that it was not invented, but selected and adapted from existing models, dramatically distinguishes it from the concepts of total replacement that preceded it. It took many years and many failures for planners and architects to reach this

point, but so many new inventions have fared so badly that designers have been forced to put some faith in human experience. Further experience will no doubt modify the precepts and techniques of the New Urbanism, but that is as it should be (Duany et al. 2000:260).

But New Urbanism runs the risk of inviting some of the same critiques leveled against suburbia, especially those of homogeneity and exclusion. Dunham-Jones cites both in the following statement “even where regional characteristics help particularize the architecture, there is a generic quality to design that draw almost exclusively on white upper middle-class traditions, and the quiet gentility and formal civic behavior associated with them” (2000:280).

Part of the perceived failure of New Urbanism lies, ironically, somewhere between a watering down of the principles and a rigidity of the same manifested in rules and uniformity. Dunham-Jones worries that formulaic production and the use of pattern books will inhibit design, promote homogeneity, and generally weaken the intent and purpose of New Urbanism. Rapoport warns against the overly designed product, claiming that “open-ended design, while structuring some parts, remains open enough to allow for the personalization and self-expression of those who live in it” (1977:205). Talen offers the following explanation:

Edward Relph sees it as a case of turning ideals into models, simplified for the purpose of . . . developers, adjusted to the less radical planning tools of zoning and neighborhood units, modified by bureaucracies, adapted to political exigencies, and otherwise thoroughly watered down for ease of application and administration (2005:270).

Of course, the watered down principles or partial implementation are not always the fault of the designer, planner, or even politician. The biggest impediment to full and successful implementation of New Urbanism principles are the twentieth century zoning codes that helped to create the suburbia and sprawl we see today. Dutton calls zoning an “instrument of separation and segregation” (2000:18). Planners and developers attempting to create mixed-use communities often have to negotiate to obtain an alarming number of waivers. Talen asserts problems with regulatory translations of New Urbanist principles and explains that “urbanists have struggled to find the right implementing mechanisms and regulatory codes to make urbanist ideals successful” (2005:269). In an effort to combat these problems, New Urbanists have worked to create TND ordinances as opposed to fighting the waiver wars. As Katz states, “the important place-maker is the code” (1994:327).

However, it is not codes, nor partial implementation, nor homogeneity that is the biggest challenge for the TND, but its own success. Demand for TNDs far exceeds supply, resulting in skyrocketing property values and rents that then limit the demographic composition of the neighborhood to only the wealthy. The TND must guard against the exclusivity that seems to be the consequence of most applied urbanist developments to date. “Failure to accommodate social diversity in the planned community is not difficult to see or understand: social diversity goals were wiped out under the weight of market success and the inability to hold on to collective and other creative means of financing” (Talen 2005:271).

The emerging planners at the beginning of the twentieth century and the New Urbanists of today hold similar thoughts about creating livable environments, and while they may be considered idealistic, they each believe their communities, through physical planning, will effect social change and more habitable environments. What is most important about their similarities is their recognition of the role of environment in behavior. As Talen tells us, the urbanists at both ends of the twentieth century recognize that “the physical world and how it is arranged holds meaning because it provides the critical supporting framework for a range of social, cultural, and economic functions” (2005:277).

CHAPTER TWO THE CASE STUDY AREA

Introducing River Ranch

The Village of River Ranch was the first TND to appear in Louisiana. A neotraditional neighborhood located in Lafayette, Louisiana, River Ranch consists of 256 acres, with another 65 acres recently acquired. About 160 acres accommodates residential homes, 16 acres are reserved for condominiums and townhouses and 80 acres are for general business development. The Vermillion River, West Martial Avenue, Kaliste Saloom Road and Steiner Road border the site. The first residents moved into the village in 1999.

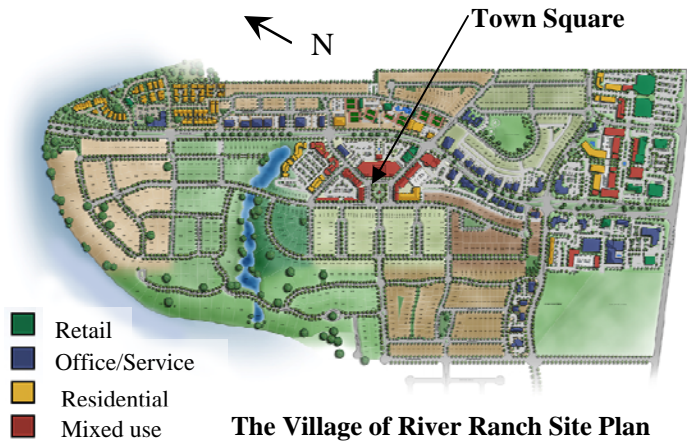


Figure 2.1: Site Plan

shop and two pools of the City Club are located across Camellia Boulevard. The amenities of the City Club are open to paying members.

Further down Camellia Boulevard is a medical clinic, offices, retail, financial institutions and a chain pharmacy. A Fresh Market is due to open by the end of this year. More retail, restaurants, apartments, and single family housing are also across Camellia Boulevard.

Preservation Lake, five acres of stocked waters for fishing, is a short walk from every home. A children's park and swimming pool are located at Ellington Park. Across Camellia Boulevard, accessed via a pedestrian tunnel or by car, Elysian Fields contains five acres of athletic fields and water



features. Eight additional parks dot the neighborhood with a network of sidewalks and trails leading to and from the residences.

There are 800 single family homesites and 750 apartments and condominiums. The projected build-out for the entire project was 10 years, by the end of 2007. At the time of this writing, the developer estimated that River Ranch is 85% complete. The acquisition of the additional 65 acres has affected the original timeline.

Context and Site

River Ranch is located in Lafayette, in the parish of Lafayette, in the southwestern portion of Louisiana, part of an area often referred to as Acadiana. Lafayette is surrounded by largely rural areas. The River Ranch site sits roughly in the south central portion of the city, an area booming with new growth.

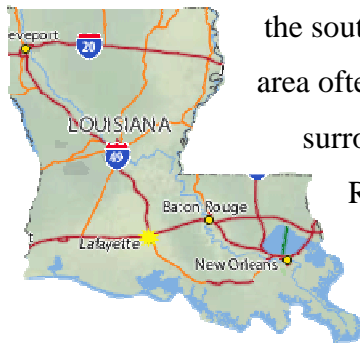


Figure 2.2: Louisiana

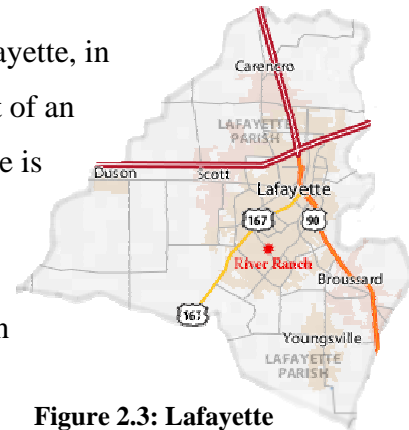


Figure 2.3: Lafayette Parish

The development is bisected by Camellia Boulevard, with the original portion located on the west side of the street. While technically an infill development (surrounded by existing development), the village is also considered by some to be a greenfield development, (because it is located toward the edge of the city) one of the critiques of New Urbanism.

Fourteen schools are located within five miles (as the crow flies) of the development, though none within River Ranch. There are private, Catholic, and public schools from elementary to high school from which to choose. The University of Louisiana at Lafayette is located to the northwest of River Ranch and is within this five-mile radius. Also nearby are a couple of vocational training schools. Parks, churches, grocery, shopping, and hospitals are easily accessible as well.

On opposite sides of the town square in River Ranch are the City Club on one side and townhomes across the square. The Carriage House condos and townhomes are on the side that parallels Camellia Boulevard and will have retail on the first floor when completed. Across the square from the Carriage House is retail with loft apartments above and the Village Market on the corner.

As you move out from the square, more retail such as boutique clothing stores, a bath and body store, a shoe store, a store for chocolate and gifts, etcetera, as well as offices, with residences and apartments above can be found. Café Roma and CC's Community Coffee House are found in this area. Live/work units are located on the other side down from the market. Moving out from there are single family residences are varying sizes and architectural styles sitting side by side on small lots. Boulevard parks and green spaces are found throughout. Preservation Lake serves as a natural buffer between the apartments and single family residences. The larger edge lots along the river and the lakes hold estate homes. Densities decrease as you move from the town center to the edge. (The portion of the development on the east side of Camellia is outside this project's scope.)

Demographics for the city of Lafayette are representative of those of the parish. According to the 2006 American Community Survey estimates, the total population of the city is 115,860, more than half the population of the parish (203,091). The racial makeup of the city is predominately white, 65.4%, with 31.5% being black or African American, and only 3.1% being of other races.

The median family income (in 2006 inflation-adjusted dollars) is \$58, 896. Approximately ten percent of families in Lafayette live below the poverty level and 17.9% of individuals do the same. The median value of homes in the city, owner-occupied, is \$144,900 and the median rent is \$594. Figures for Lafayette parish are all slightly lower as expected for a more rural area (www.census.gov).

Project Background and History

In 1952, Adam Dugas bought 256 acres adjacent to the Vermillion River for \$35,000 to realize his dream of owning and operating a horse and cattle farm (Boudoin and Spell-Johnson 1998:53). The family referred to the farm as "the ranch," which is how River Ranch later got its name.

When it came time to sell the ranch, the owners, Dugas Partnership, LLC, of which the granddaughter, Lisa Hullin Breaux was a member, asked Robert Daigle to find a buyer. Daigle put together a group and bought the property. The original River Ranch Development Company, LLC, bought the ranch in November of 1996. In 1997, three of the partners (including Daigle) bought out the rest to make the River Ranch Development Company, LLC of today.

In 1990, architect and planner Steve Oubre became “enamored” of the New Urbanism concept having previously worked on a plan with Andres Duany, and “wanted to get one built.” For four years, according to Oubre, he approached anyone who had property over 100 acres. In 1994, he brought his idea to Robert Daigle, then the attorney for the owners of the River Ranch farm. Daigle dismissed the idea, thinking Lafayette was not ready for the concept.

Originally, Robert Daigle, now co-owner of River Ranch Development Company, LLC proposed the Village of River Ranch as a conventional suburban development. The first objections were based on the NADA (No Additional Development Anywhere) principle. The adjacent property owners decried the consumption of a greenfield site. Other complaints involved having commercial businesses less than twenty feet from backyards and the movement of the proposed Camellia Boulevard extension to within 300 feet of property lines. Public outcry resulted in denial by the Planning Commission and the City-Parish Council.

After a partnership shake up in the development company, Daigle then called Oubre to draw up his TND plan for the property. In July of 1997, Oubre and Daigle hosted a week-long charrette that brought the public together with not only the architect and developer, but also landscaping, engineering, historical and financial consultants. Traffic engineers and representatives of local government also participated. Working with the public this time resulted in agreements that would keep Camellia Boulevard 450 feet from any other property and would place houses and trees as buffers between businesses in River Ranch and the adjacent homes.

According to Oubre, “these sessions worked toward developing the master plan, the building standards and types, the landscaping ordinances as well as the governing codes.” With the public involved in the design and their concerns being heard and addressed, little opposition was left. Planning Commission approval came only three weeks after the charrette. The village received permitting in August of 1997 and construction began in February, 1998.

Architect’s Goals

With his long-term social and ecological doctrine, the architect intended to build a neighborhood that fosters community, which is inclusive with mixed uses and walkable services, and where multiple generations of the same family can afford to live in the same neighborhood. He envisioned public parks and an abundance of green space, as well as preservation of the natural resources and features for now and for the future. His idea included a varied streetscape

that maintained a unified vision of a neighborhood appropriate to the geographic and cultural region of its place with representative Acadian and Creole architecture.

In her 1999 article in the *Times of Acadiana*, Broussard references James Howard Kuntsler's *The Geography of Nowhere: the Rise and Decline of America's Man-made Landscape*: "Kuntsler claims that our automobile-driven society – in which we get in the car for everything from buying a loaf of bread to mailing a letter – has resulted in residential areas devoid of green space, corner stores and meeting areas, and thus devoid of community" (p.19). It is exactly this that Oubre hopes to prevent. "'We're not designing the streets to move automobiles. We're designing the streets to create a social relationship among the residents,' says Oubre" (The Times of Acadiana 1997: 8).

Oubre also envisioned a long-term ecological doctrine with this development. His efforts to this end include the preservation of natural resources (the lake and trees) on the site; maintenance of the pre-development natural landscape, water flow, and flood basins to minimize development effect on neighboring properties; lake expansion for retention ponds; preservation of land and increased green space through compact development; additional tree plantings and landscaping; and a walkable community that purports to reduce automobile usage, lessening carbon outputs. In River Ranch, "every house will be within a three-minute walk of a park and seven-minute walk of the town center" (Kurtz 1997:8).

To further support this doctrine, the architect explains that development guidelines prescribe a "creole architectural vernacular, time-tested to be energy efficient, utilizing mandated operable windows and shutters, high ceilings and sun screening devices" designed to limit negative environmental impact and emphasize sense of place through reinforcing the local Acadian culture.



Image 2.2: Ellendale Boulevard and park.

Smaller front yards bring the porches close to the street, encouraging conversations among neighbors. Mail for the residents is housed at the Village Market, a potential meeting area. And the town center square provides a community gathering place. Cultural and artistic events that support local artists are sponsored by The River Ranch Institute, a non-

profit sector of the homeowner's association and are held in the town square. As Oubre declares "The Village of River Ranch as a traditional neighborhood development prescribes to the techniques and planning principles that stress human scale and the creation of a meaningful quality of life."

Understanding the level of success of these goals requires a two-fold approach. First, I determined to what degree these goals were actually implemented and accomplished by comparing observation with the original intent. Next, I investigated not only how the residents feel about the goals (backed by the behaviors they exhibit), but also whether the level of realization of the goals affects the responses of the residents. To clarify, I was looking to find what works and what doesn't for the users among the architect's goals at the level they are implemented. While I am attempting to evaluate River Ranch as a neighborhood, I am also attempting to inform the discourse surrounding the TND model.

CHAPTER THREE ANALYSIS

Observations

Excerpts from Field Notes

It is Thursday, April 15, 2007 and I am sitting in Windsor Park. The park is surrounded



Image 3.1: Windsor Park

by one lane, one-way streets on which street parking is allowed. Beautifully maintained houses, sitting cozily side by side and sporting small front gardens line the streets. This is my first day of formal, structured observations and I have arrived at 1:30 p.m. with plans to observe for an hour. Armed with a book, notebook, and camera, I settle in.

It is one of those rare, beautiful spring days not often seen in south Louisiana. There is bright sunshine, not a cloud to be seen, and the temperature is in the 70s with low humidity and a soft cool breeze blowing. A perfect day to be outdoors.

In the hour in which I sit in Windsor Park, I see two mid-adult (see Table 3.1) female joggers, one mid-adult female walking, one male teen walking, and two male tweens who cut across the green. All are white. Not as many people as I thought I would see on such a beautiful day, but it is midday on a weekday, and the start of the Easter Holiday weekend. People may be on vacation. Perhaps I'll have better luck elsewhere.

| Designation | Corresponding Age Group |
|-------------|-------------------------|
| Tween | Ages 9 to 12 |
| Teen | Ages 13 to 17 |
| Young Adult | Ages 18 to 35 |
| Mid-adult | Ages 36 to 59 |
| Senior | Ages 60 + |

Table 3.1: Estimated age group designations used in observations.



Image 3.2: Ellington Park

From 2:30 p.m. to 4:40 p.m., I observe in Ellington Park. Ellington is the only park in River Ranch on the west side of Camellia with children's playground equipment. The park also contains a small swimming pool that opens Memorial Day and a basketball court with two goals.

There is more activity here. Three children arrive together and play. The children run from one play structure to the next, to the swings, and back again. Young adult women come with babies and toddlers in tow. One has a small dog. Several women congregate and visit, standing in clumps or creating their own seating on the “wall” that borders one part of the play area. There are three such groupings. One woman stands apart and supervises her children. She doesn’t seem to know anyone and keeps to herself. Only the kids who come together play together – there is no intermingling.

The bigger of the two climbing apparatus appears to be the favorite among the children, receiving the most attention for the longest period of time. Some groups stay as little as five minutes, with only one group staying for about twenty minutes. All the children appear to be under the age of ten.

Everyone is white, with the exception of one boy of indeterminate ethnicity, possibly black or mixed-race. He and his two friends play for awhile and then he calls to them, “let’s go play at my house!” They run off down the street, confirming that he is indeed a resident in what seems to be, so far, a largely homogenous community of Caucasians.

The park is in a corner and I find it interesting that there is a house under construction with one wall just feet from the edge of the park. There is no fence or border wall to act as a buffer between it and the noise and hubbub of the playground. The park is enclosed on the back and the side that faces Camellia Boulevard, but not on the two sides with houses. The other house though, has a brick wall separating the resident’s courtyard from the park. I find it interesting that someone would choose to build so close to the park with no fence. I would like to find out why they chose this lot.

End Field Notes

On Thursday nights for seven weeks in the spring and seven in the fall, River Ranch puts on a concert called Rhythms on the River which takes place in the town square. A band is hired to play, using funds from the homeowner’s association and also from sponsors. Food and drinks are offered for sale on the perimeter of the square. Sometimes local artists set up on Richland Avenue to sell their



Image 3.3: Selling wares by town square.

wares. The residents of the townhouses that face the square have their own street party, with their front doors open and tables with food and drink set up on the sidewalk. After the concert, many continue their parties into the night.

The event is open to the public and attracts a huge crowd of both residents of River Ranch and those of Lafayette and the surrounding towns. People arrive on foot, bicycle,



Image 3.4: Rhythms on the River concert in the square.

motorbike, and golf cart bringing food, chairs and blankets to picnic on the green. Many people bring their dogs. Children run around madly screaming with delight. The older kids organize games with balls.

Everyone is decked out in the latest style – this is also a singles scene. Most seniors have arrived early and claim the chairs in front for the duration. Everyone from tweens to mid-adults mill around, meeting and mingling. The dogs seem to bring strangers together as people stop to pet them and start a conversation.

Field Notes

I can't imagine anyone who considers themselves private or introverted choosing to live on the square. Rhythms is a madhouse of activity and noise. Does how social you are affect where you choose to live in River Ranch? Would this limit your housing choices? For instance, what if you are private, but wish to live in a townhouse? What are your compromises?

On this night, I see only one black child. Everyone else is white. On the “outside,” outside the village that is, River Ranch is thought of as “where the rich, white people live.” This is one of the things I intend to investigate further.

There appears to be an interesting opinion of the village from outsiders. [During the course of my research I had the opportunity to converse with people who live in Lafayette, but not in River Ranch.] River Ranch is denigrated for being exclusionary, both economically and racially. Outsiders report with barely suppressed glee the rumors of residents living beyond their means, of foreclosures, and of shoddy construction practices. There is almost an “us versus them” attitude. Are these perceptions true? Something to find out.

End Notes

My first weekend of observations yielded little information except that no one appears to use the boulevard parks and small green spaces or pocket parks. There also seemed to be relatively few people walking or jogging, and I saw no one using their porches, despite the beautiful weather. Saturday, though, dawned blustery, miserably cold and misty, and it is no wonder hardly anyone was in the square with their children for the Easter Egg Hunt and other activities.

I'm left to wonder how the residents use this beautiful, planned neighborhood. Are the architect's goals achieved? Does providing front porches, sidewalks and parks actually stimulate their use? Does this create community? Do people really walk more and drive less? I conducted my observations to better answer these questions.

As noted earlier, I completed 49 formal observations and several informal observations in eleven locations within my observation study area (see Figure 3.1).

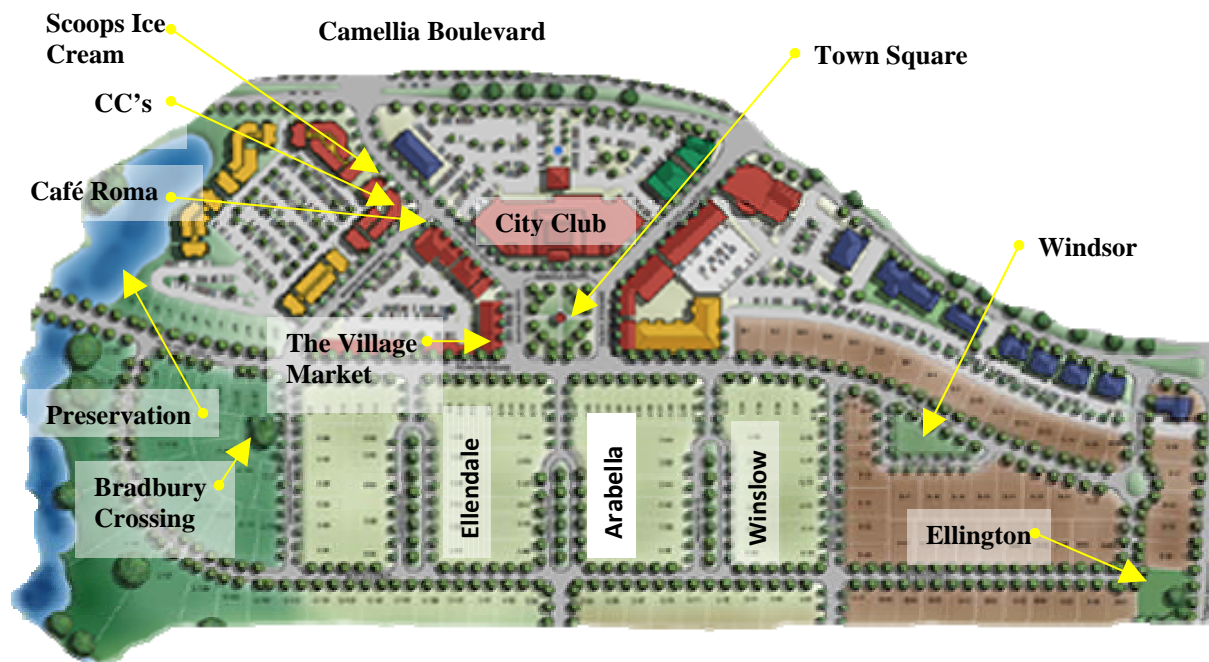


Figure 3.1: Observation Study Area.

The observation locations were: The Village Market; Café Roma; CC's Community Coffee House; Scoops Ice Cream shop; Ellington Park; Windsor Park; the Winslow, Arabella, and Ellendale Boulevard parks; Bradbury Crossing Park, Preservation Park, and the Town Square. (See Appendix C for schedule of observations.)



Image 3.5: Arabella Park



Image 3.6: Ellendale Park



Image 3.7: Ellington Park



Image 3.8: Ellington Park



Image 3.9: Winslow Park



Images 3.10: Bradbury Crossing



Image 3.11: Windsor Park



Image 3.12: Windsor Park



Image 3.13: Preservation Park

In addition, I walked my research area in one-hour blocks of time at different times of the day and on different days of the week. (See Figure 3.2.) One hour equaled two circuits of the area.



Figure 3.2: Observation walking route.

All of the parks have benches and Dogi Pots with handy waste bags for residents to clean up and dispose of dog waste. Five of the eight parks in my research area have water features. The fountains are soothing and invite meditation and relaxation; however the

backless stone benches are too uncomfortable to sit for long. For the most part, the parks are well maintained, but a closer look reveals dying plants, broken or buckled cobbles, weeds, and spreading ant piles. These are all relatively minor and would escape most people's notice. Bradbury Crossing Park, though, is in the worst shape. The grass is patchy and dying, there are spreading patches of dirt, dying plants, and dog waste. Part of the pond liner is clearly visible and one day I observed that someone had put soap in the fountain. It was full of suds.

Further observations confirmed my earlier thoughts that five of the parks are rarely, if ever, used regardless of time of day or day of the week: Bradbury, Ellendale, Arabella, Winslow, and Windsor. All of my park observations occurred on beautiful days, so weather was not the issue. Windsor Park saw the most activity of those five. On one occasion I saw a bride in her gown having photographs taken as she sat by the fountain. During another observation period, I saw a young adult male with a toddler stop in and the toddler splashed his hands in the water. They stayed perhaps three minutes before moving on. Only two other persons were observed in Windsor, a senior female with a baby in a stroller stopped to rest on one of the benches. She stayed exactly one minute. No one else was observed utilizing the park. My presence and its possible effect on park usage or the duration of use must be considered.



Image 3.14: Example of behavior trace: suds in the fountain at Bradbury Crossing park.



Image 3.15: Ellendale Park.

My time in Ellendale Park yielded three children under ten playing under the big oak tree there. A mid-adult female and senior female had chairs on the sidewalk in front of the house across the street to supervise. The children ran back and forth between playing by the tree and on the porch or the sidewalk. This occurred off and on for about an hour. It is by far the longest length of time I have viewed activity in the parks. While Ellington playground saw the most activity, other than Preservation Park, the children never stayed for very long – 25 minutes being the longest, five to ten minutes being the average.

I never saw anyone in Arabella or Bradbury Parks, although the soap suds indicated use of some sort in Bradbury. A senior male was observed exiting his house with his dog and crossing into Winslow Park. As soon as the dog relieved himself, they returned inside. Otherwise, there was no activity.



Image 3.16: Winslow Park.

During these observations, people were noted walking, jogging or riding bikes past the parks, though never more than a handful throughout the time period. The number of cars passing greatly exceeded the number of pedestrians or cyclists. For instance, during a one-hour period in Arabella Park in the early afternoon, I observed one walker and two joggers. In contrast, upwards of 50 vehicles passed by in that same time period. It should be noted that Arabella Boulevard is one of the most direct routes to the town square and sees more traffic than some of the other streets. Observations in other areas saw similar results regarding the pedestrian/vehicle contrast.

The town square is also rarely used, except during scheduled neighborhood events. I did observe some teens with book bags sitting on a bench and talking one day. On another day, some teens gathered in the gazebo. A young adult male was also seen throwing a tennis ball for his dog on the green.



Image 3.17: Teens in gazebo in town square.

Of the parks in my study area, only Ellington and Preservation saw significant activity. The playground was busiest after school. Most users were children under ten and some were with an adult or teen supervisor. Almost all walked or rode bikes to the park. Occasionally, groups of tween or teen boys would play basketball, or hang out on the street. Although a small park, it was never full.

Weekends, the visitors to the playground were fewer and farther between. This surprised me, but I did remember that the City Club has a large swimming pool and tennis courts across Camellia Boulevard and perhaps families go there on the weekend or outside of the village.



Image 3.18: Family bikes around Preservation Lake.

Preservation Park is mostly used in the early mornings before 9:00 a.m. and in early evenings between 5:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. The park is utilized in several ways. Residents walk, jog, or bike around the lake on the sidewalk, either in repeated circuits or as part of a route that connects to other paths through the neighborhood. Most appear to be engaging in purposeful exercise, as opposed to walking for pleasure.

This is the major type of usage by far, followed closely by taking the dog out for waste elimination purposes only by the apartment residents with pets, and dog walking. I also observed a boy throwing a ball for his dog to retrieve in the lake and a man fishing.



Image 3.20: The occasional fisherman can be seen at Preservation Lake.

During my two week stay, I observed that certain groups of people tended to use this park at certain times. Sundays appear to be the choice of the mid-adult resident for purposeful walking and dog walking. Saturday afternoons are filled with children. Seniors tend to walk between 6:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. on weekday mornings, again, some walking dogs, and evenings after work sees a mix of ages. A few joggers and cyclists make the circuit and some dog walkers.

Observations of The Village Market, CC's Coffee House, Café Roma, and Scoops Ice Cream shop were difficult. I had intended to try to determine if residents of the neighborhood walked to these establishments, or if they chose to drive, as well as to assess usage rates. Except for a few on-street parking spaces near these eateries, most people need to park in one of several nearby parking lots, therefore walking to the restaurants. Because it was impossible to see all the parking, it was not possible to accurately determine how



Image 3.19: At Preservation Lake.



Image 3.21: Walking for exercise in Preservation Park.

people came to this area. In addition, these places are open to people who do not live in River Ranch, and so identifying who was a resident and who not was not possible.

Instead, I decided to observe the ages of the people to see if one or any of the restaurants saw a clientele made up largely of a certain generation, or if they were a mix of ages. I also noted families, couples, and people eating alone, to determine if there was any particular tendency there as well. In addition, I attempted to informally gauge the amount of business the restaurants received in comparison to the amount of business the retail nearby at the Crescent Apartments received.

The Village Market, on the corner of the square near the townhomes, appeared to be the hub of the neighborhood. Mailboxes for the residents are housed here. A small supply of “daily foods” type of groceries are provided, such as milk, orange juice, eggs, sugar, coffee, mayonnaise, ketchup and the like. The majority of product in the market leans toward specialty items – wines, cheeses, and a small offering of homemade jams, sauces, and soups. These products line the walls in shelves or coolers, while the interior space is reserved for tables and chairs serving customers of the restaurant division of the market.

The Village Market restaurant does a brisk business during weekday and Saturday lunch. (It is closed on Sunday.) People of all ages frequent the market and arrive on foot, bike, or in golf carts or cars. According to the proprietor, nine out of ten families have accounts there. This allows children to come in any time without their parents and charge items to their account. It is not uncommon to see kids, tweens, or teens buying snacks or icees.

Some customers get their food to go, but most sit and visit, outside if they can. Construction workers eat or order there as well. The husband and wife team who own the market live in River Ranch and appear to know everyone. They seem to be the eyes and ears of the community and appear to know which children belong to which adults. Customers are greeted by name.

Late afternoon to early evening (the market closes at 7:00 p.m.) is the key mail retrieving time. This appears to also serve as social time and informal networking opportunity for the residents. Many stop to greet or chat with the proprietors.



Image 3.22: Lunch outside the Village Market.

Café Roma is a casual, but nice restaurant located across the street from CC's. It is common to see customers start out at CC's and then walk to Café Roma, or stop for coffee at CC's after dining. Except for a brief lull between 11:45 a.m. and 12:15 p.m., Café Roma has a steady influx of customers, mostly families and couples, during Sunday lunch. Almost always the outside tables are taken first. Café Roma is on a busy corner, with the City Club across Stonemount Road, and CC's and retail shops across Bradbury Crossing. These two streets serve to channel people in and out of the neighborhood. The outside seating at Café Roma or at CC's is a great vantage point to see the activity of the village (and be seen).

The streets are busy at this time with cars, people on bikes, and golf carts filled with families carrying swim paraphernalia, heading to and from the gym. Although I do not know where the people in golf carts live, I can imagine that it is a convenient way to get from the back of the development to the pool and courts across Camellia Boulevard.

Weekday lunches at the restaurant see a steady crowd, but not overwhelmingly busy. There are more females than males, from young adults to seniors. Almost all the females are in small groups, some appear to be family, others friends and co-workers. There are some couples here as well.

Time constraints prevented formal observation at Café Roma during the evening, but I know from personal experience that you must have a reservation on the Thursday nights of Rhythms on the River and for other special events in the village.

CC's is also a hub, but here there a larger number of outsiders than at the market. For some, CC's is a place for a quick stop for coffee and a paper, others socialize, some work or study, meetings are held, chess is played and philosophy discussed. I observe some customers



Image 3.23: Visiting at CC's.

stopping by to or from shopping at the adjacent retail or walking from the City Club. Others appear in business clothes and seem to be coming from work. While difficult to distinguish for certain the residents, it does appear that many residents frequent CC's.

Joggers, cyclists, and people walking dogs also stop in. In some cases, the animals facilitate introductions and conversations between strangers.

One Sunday morning, I stopped to talk with two young adult females sitting on the patio outside CC's with their chocolate lab. One of the women lives in an adjacent neighborhood, and the other is her sister visiting from out of town. The Lafayette woman tells me that she used to always walk from her home to the village to walk around for exercise. "But now," she says, "It's just too busy – too many cars." She does take friends or family who are visiting to the village for coffee, to eat, or just to drive or walk around "because it is so pretty."

Saturday mornings at CC's see many people stopping by for coffee and visiting friends. The weekday and weekend morning crowds appear to be mostly adults, while the evenings attract the teens. On one evening I observe groups of teens with laptops and book-bags camped out and working diligently, or not. There are many interruptions to greet friends or travel to another table ostensibly to ask a question. Tomorrow, I find out, is exam day.

Most weekday mornings are busy, with lines forming for beverages and sometimes a pastry. Most of these customers make their purchases and leave. Overall, though, it appears that CC's has about as many "to go" customers as they do those that stay.

Scoops Ice Cream seems to be the hotspot for the under-ten-years-of-age crowd after school. All who are old enough to be in school are in uniforms. Some are dropped off or arrive on their own, but others are accompanied by a mother or female adult, sometimes a female teen. The moms gather inside at the tables and visit in the air conditioning, while the youngsters run in and out screaming and laughing. Some of the older girls sit on benches outside Scoops in the small patio that separates the two apartment buildings that have retail on the first floor. Here they eat their ice cream cones and whisper to each other, while the younger children try to get their attention.

During one observation, a small group of teen boys arrive and hang out outside the shop, occasionally going in and out Scoops. The boys are dressed in the "uniform" of the day, including shaggy hair, t-shirts with faded lettering, and shorts. Two sit on the back of one of the benches that line the outside wall of the shop, their feet on the seat. One leans lazily against the wall, and the others stand on the sidewalk. Occasionally, a peer will arrive and stop to



Image 3.24: Teens visit outside of Scoops.

talk, but then move on. The core five stay. At one point the boys move off the wall to stand by the shop's sandwich board sign on the sidewalk. They surround the sign, blocking the view. A minute later, they casually wander back to their spot by the wall and bench. The letter "s" in "snack" is now gone from the sign.

My walking circuits around my study area helped to clarify and solidify the information gathered from my various stationary observations. My route began on Stonemount road, heading roughly southeast, then turning northwest onto Bradbury Crossing, south on Worth Avenue, continuing east on Worth, north on Richland Avenue and then down the side of the square and back to Stonemount. (Refer to Figure 3.2.) Although my route skirted the perimeter of the observation area, it was easy to see down the interior streets as I went along.

The walks were very pleasant. The architecture, the gardens, and the parks are beautiful. The sound of splashing water can be heard from the fountains hidden behind the courtyard walls. If it is not too early, you can hear the birds sing. Scents of gardenia and jasmine, two favorites in the neighborhood, fill the air. I think to myself that if I lived here, I would be out on my porch or walking every chance I could get.

The only blemish on this picturesque scene is the construction debris, port-a-potties, and dirt and mud blocking the sidewalks.

Construction is still taking place in this area and around the village. I notice that most people use the streets rather than the sidewalks, although some



Image 3.25: Construction activity often blocks the sidewalks.



Image 3.26: Couple strolls their baby in the neighborhood.

stick to the sidewalks when they can. I rarely see more than one person on the sidewalk. If two or more people are walking together, they usually move on to the street. The exceptions are kids under ten years and people

strolling babies, who tend to stay on the sidewalks.

Occasionally, I see something that doesn't seem quite right. A house in an architectural style that is certainly not indicative of Acadiana vernacular. Or a house with a huge stone wall blocking the front from the street – very anti-TND. I am curious about this because I know there were strict architectural

guidelines when the village was conceived and an architectural review board to ensure appropriate sense of place and adherence to the concept.

It is often so quiet in the early mornings that the only thing I hear is the sound of a lone jogger's footfalls on the pavement. I'd been told the walkers and joggers come out in force early in the mornings.

By this time, I had yet to see the numbers of walkers, joggers, and cyclists that I had expected coming into this research. So I started out at 5:30 a.m. on a beautiful, cool morning, but again saw few people, only ten in the space of two and a half hours. Interestingly, though, the gym at the City Club seemed active. The 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. hour saw more people out on the streets than earlier, but just a slight increase. This was surprising to me because I would think most people would have exercised earlier to be at work for 8:00 a.m. or so.

Weekday evenings see more activity, but mostly kids and tweens walking, biking, or skateboarding. Some stop at the market. On one circuit I can see over a courtyard fence, a man and boy throwing a ball back and forth. The courtyards are small; I would hardly think there is enough room. On the following circuit I see that I am right. The ball playing duo has moved to the boulevard park across the street where there is more room and they can spread farther apart. This is the type of activity I had expected to see more of in the parks.

Weekend evenings see about the same amount of outdoor activity on the streets, only this time it is a mix of age groups walking and biking. It appears that my walks supported my earlier impressions that many of the parks are underutilized and that the walkable aspect of the neighborhood is not being as fully capitalized upon as I had expected.

I also saw few people on their porches, only two men, a boy with his cat, and a couple on a swing. I did see a mid-adult couple entertaining on their balcony on a nice evening. On another evening I saw a couple, each with a glass of wine, inspecting their front garden, and then beginning a leisurely stroll toward the town square. There were sounds of people laughing and smells of food grilling behind a few courtyard walls at times. I occasionally saw someone walk across to chat with a neighbor in their front yard.



Image 3.27: Incongruent architecture with large stone wall in front.



Image 3.28: Visiting with neighbors.

What I begin to realize is that I am seeing the same people over and over – on the porch, walking the dog, jogging, cycling, strolling the baby, walking to the town square. Critics say that walkable communities do not necessarily promote activity, as it is the very people who already exercise in this way who are attracted to, and move into, walkable neighborhoods. That is to say, walkable communities do not necessarily create more walkers, people may just self-select. I wonder if there isn't some truth to that, as the percentage of people I see out is just a small percentage of those who live in the village. I wonder if the close proximity of the gym has anything to do with this. This is something else I probe in my interviews.

During the 16 ½ days of observation, I saw fewer than 10 people of color. It was unclear in some cases whether these people were residents of the village or not.

As the neighborhood is well kept up, not many behavior traces were observed. A break in the fence behind Ellington Park did reveal itself to be a cut-through. The drinking fountain in the same park was broken, with its front panel halfway pulled off. I overheard the maintenance man muttering, “those kids destroy everything!” This may or may not be a sign of vandalism.

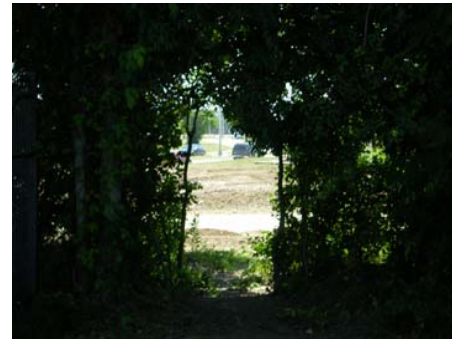


Image 3.29: Behavior trace – Cut-through in fence.



Image 3.30: Behavior trace – Cigarette butts.

Cigarette butts and dog waste were perhaps the most common trace I found, but only in the green by the apartments and in areas of construction or vacant lots. As I noted these, I realized that I

have seen very few people smoking and those were only at CC's. Are there more nonsmokers in this neighborhood than smokers? Or is it that the smokers do so in private? Or is it that there are just more nonsmokers today? This is interesting, but beyond the scope of this project.

I also occasionally noted children's bikes or scooters parked neatly in the bike racks provided at some locations indicating that there are children biking to destinations. There were also a few abandoned on the sidewalk in front of a house. In one instance, I saw a boy race to the bikes, select his, and ride off down the street. It seems children are free to bike to their friends' houses. In fact, it is not unusual to see groups of children under ten walking around the

neighborhood or riding bikes during the day. It would seem the parents feel free to let their children play and visit friends in and around the neighborhood on their own.

The observations bolstered some theories, but also raised questions about others. In the discussion section I match the interview results with my observations to ascertain the veracity of my findings.



Image 3.31: Parents feel children are safe in the neighborhood.

Interviews

The interviews (see Appendix B for interview questions) attempted to interrogate the residents' usage of the development amenities and their perceptions of and satisfaction level with the neighborhood in an effort to determine if the architect's goals were successful in creating a livable environment for the users.

To better understand the residents' previous housing and neighborhood experiences, the first questions queried the motive behind the resident's move to River Ranch, what type of housing and neighborhood they moved from, and the size of their household. The large majority of subjects came from single family homes in traditional subdivision and golf communities located in south Louisiana. Two came from Europe and Australia, both from apartments. The rest came from single family homes in more rural areas.

Most subjects reported two persons living in the household. There were eight families ranging in size from three to five residents. Eight were single. Some stated that they had finished raising their children in River Ranch and were now empty nesters.

Sixty percent said they had chosen to move to River Ranch because they liked the neighborhood and the concept behind it as they understood it. Fifteen percent said they moved in an effort to downsize and reduce property maintenance responsibility. Slightly fewer reported both downsizing and liking the neighborhood as their reasons for moving in. Another fifteen percent maintained they moved in because they liked the neighborhood and also thought it would be a good investment.

Eight of the subjects had one or more relatives already living in River Ranch and considered having family nearby a bonus. In addition, they were familiar with the village before relocating there. One respondent moved specifically to be next door to a sibling and to be able to build an accessible house due to a disability.

I developed the interview questions in an effort to corroborate the observed behaviors and activities and to determine residents' assessments of the achievement of the architect's goals, as well as their satisfaction level with each. For the twenty-nine respondents who said they walked, biked, or jogged in the neighborhood on a regular basis, the vast majority replied that they did so for exercise, pleasure, and to get to a destination. One subject stated: "I walk for pleasure or to a destination. If I want to exercise, I use the gym." Three said they did not walk to destinations and one reported walking only for pleasure. The rest responded that they did so either for exercise and pleasure, or exercise and to a destination.

To see if the design of River Ranch inspired more non-motorized transport for the residents, the subjects were asked to compare this with their level of activity in their previous neighborhoods. Slightly more than half reported that they did walk, jog, or bike more since moving into River Ranch and agreed that they used their cars less, although two percent of the active residents stated it had not enabled them to reduce the automobile usage. One subject said, "I don't understand why people run in the gym all day when they have this on their doorstep!"

To determine the walking and driving habits on a typical day, residents were asked to recount the day before, step by step, from the time they got up to the time they went to bed. They were also asked to do the same for the weekend. Probes were used to ensure maximum detail and to avoid missed pedestrian or motorized trips. It appears from this inquiry that the residents who reported walking more and driving less walked often and used their cars infrequently. In this case, we must rely on anecdotal evidence of whether this is actually more or less than what they did in their previous neighborhoods as we have no data for comparison.

Those subjects that reported walking more said they did so because the environment in River Ranch was more conducive to it than their old neighborhoods and that in this village they had things to walk to. Residents were then asked to comment upon the following elements that make a neighborhood more walkable and whether River Ranch provided these: trees for shade, enough sidewalks and sidewalks of adequate size, benches or places to rest along the way, a feeling of safety (from traffic and crime), and not feeling overwhelmed by the buildings (buildings at human scale).

The large majority loved the walking environment and commended the architect and developer for providing the above listed features. "This neighborhood is wonderful for walking. I feel safe," commented one senior. Of those who disagreed, the major complaint was of the

sidewalks only. These opinions were split among the issues of the construction detritus that blocked the sidewalks, as well as the lack of sidewalks in front of empty lots (the sidewalk ends) and sidewalk size. One complained about the construction, saying “I can’t ever walk on the sidewalk. There are always portable toilets or other things blocking it. In eight years I haven’t been able to walk on the sidewalk to a destination.” Three commented that “the sidewalks could be wider.” One resident said she felt overshadowed by the buildings and wished there were more space between them, and three reported that there were no places to rest along the way.

Residents were queried on their level of park usage to determine green space utilization. Twenty-one percent asserted that they never used any of the parks, one stating, “There is nothing there for me . . . perhaps if I had children.” Another said, “When the kids were smaller we did. They’re really for younger kids. If I’m going to sit outside, I’ll sit in my courtyard.” Regardless, they liked having the parks there. Stressing that the parks are important, even if not used, one resident emphasized their aesthetic value, “I utilize them in the sense of the visual effect of the parks.”

As to which parks are used, the vast majority reported Ellington Park (the playground) and Preservation Park. In the case of Ellington, usage for some is sporadic, only when the grandchildren are visiting. A few mentioned parks outside of the observation area on the east side of Camellia Boulevard (Elysian Fields and the Ascension Day School, a daycare, park). One reported walking her dog every day at Bradbury Crossing since it was right behind her residence. Two mentioned Windsor Park to play with a child or dog around the fountain. One of these subjects lives next door to the park.

No one said they used any of the linear boulevard parks. One couple after conferring agreed, “we’ve never seen anyone in those parks.”

Nearly forty percent reported using the retail shops in River Ranch either rarely or not at all, although some admitted they didn’t shop much anyway. A handful said they used the retail on a regular basis. The rest acknowledged only sometimes shopping in the village. (The Village Market and CC’s were excluded from this question as everyone reported using one or both.)

On questions of community, the vast majority declared knowing almost all of their near neighbors, as well as many others in the development and assert that they met most, if not all, walking, on the porch or in the front garden, getting mail, or at planned community events. They reported seeing them often in these places, as well as in the restaurants and the gym. With the

exception of two homeowners and a few of the apartment dwellers, all said they knew a significantly larger number of neighbors in River Ranch compared to those known in previous neighborhoods. One apartment renter said he did not think that apartment living lent itself to knowing your neighbors.

When asked to describe what the word ‘community’ meant to them, most residents defined it as a place where people know each other, are friendly and spend leisure time together; where you can call on your neighbor for help; where the people have common goals; and where you feel a sense of belonging. One added that it is a place of comfort, safety, and security. Almost all agreed that River Ranch met this definition, even if they themselves did not feel it. One resident felt isolated in her apartment and another admitted she did not make an effort to experience community.

One resident said,

it [the village] reminds me of how I grew up in a small community. We would ride bikes to the park, the neighbors, to school or to the grocery. You felt safe. Everyone knows each other. I wanted to relive that and have my kids experience it.

As to how community manifests itself in River Ranch, a subject explained, “what makes it work is when you have meeting places.” Others agreed: “they have mechanisms in place for it [community]. You are able to meet neighbors not close to you at the [City] club, getting mail, or at Rhythms on the River.” Another added, “there are always people out walking. A five-minute walk can turn into an hour walk by the time you finish talking to everyone.”

In describing community in the village, one man reported on one of the aspects he liked, “everyone has the same goals. You want to have friends that are not jealous of you . . . I love being able to enjoy the success of my neighbors.”

In further discussion, subjects were asked about each of the architect’s goals individually and whether they thought these objectives had been satisfactorily achieved. All agreed that there were mixed uses with services and parks within walking distance and almost all that there was a sense of community where neighbors know each other. Three apartment residents and one homeowner reported not feeling the sense of community, but knowing it existed for others through experience or anecdotal evidence.

Most subjects felt that there were people of all ages as residents in the village, although some expressed there were not enough young adults and some commented that the senior population dominated. Conversely, some apartment inhabitants thought there were not enough seniors and would like to see more residents their age. Several residents on the east side of Camellia Boulevard, the area still undergoing the most development, reported that there were not enough young children.

The biggest disagreements occurred with the issues of creating a sense of place architecturally, and socioeconomic and racial diversity. Sense of place in this situation was clarified with the architect and defined for the subjects as a place where the buildings feel as though they belong in Acadiana. Over a third of respondents answered, “yes, but Daigle [the developer] is not staying true to the concept anymore.” One of these subjects added, “a couple of houses – I wonder how they got past architectural review.” Others were more disappointed and angry about this issue, saying “if you have enough money they’ll let you build whatever you want.” Several expressed concern about this departure from the concept as it was one reason they thought this development was special. And many were angry that they had to go through such strict review, only to have the rules relaxed for others later.

Three respondents said, “they [the buildings] look like they belong in River Ranch, but I don’t know about Acadiana.” Four thought the buildings looked as though they belonged in New Orleans, while two suggested the development as a whole reminded them of Europe. The rest agreed that a sense of place had been achieved.

As to building type diversity, all but one agreed that while there was unity in architectural style, there was enough diversity in type for interest, “definitely not cookie cutter.” Only one resident felt it was homogenous.

The next area of contention concerned whether or not the residents thought River Ranch was socioeconomically diverse. Nearly a quarter said that it was. One woman declared, “yes, there are a lot of people here with a lot more money than us!” A gentleman asserted that “anyone can live here if they want to. There are houses they can afford.” His wife murmured, “I don’t think you can get \$150 per square foot anymore.” One subject later informed me that “five people [in River Ranch] own their own jets.” I was also told about a new resident who just sold his company for \$250 million and another who sold his for \$400 million.

Some defended their 'yes' answer saying, "no one could have predicted how wildly popular this would be." One remarked that "but most New Urbanism neighborhoods miss the mark here." Another stated, "the hurricane [Katrina] made everything go up in cost, including the cost of construction, especially with the new codes."

The majority of subjects disagreed, responding that they did not believe that socioeconomic diversity had been achieved. Comments ranged from "are you kidding?! Everyone knows this is the rich neighborhood" to "you have to have some cash to live here. There is no cheap housing." Some expressed concern about this: "it worries me, how many more families can afford to live here?" One of the seniors recognized that "the neighborhood is out of reach for a lot of seniors. You need another source of income. None of my children can afford to live here – even with good jobs." Another resident was of the same opinion:

The price points were supposed to be low, medium, and high. The prices were reasonable when we moved in, now they're unattainable in my opinion. My biggest concern is the price points. I think they're priced out of the market for younger people and some elderly.

As to the question of racial or ethnic diversity within the neighborhood, subjects were about equally mixed. However, five of the 'yes' respondents were 'yes, but' answers. These were: "yes, given the demographics of the area;" "yes, but the majority are white;" and "yes, but it is not representative."

Most of the 'yes' group added a listing of those races or ethnicities that they knew or had seen in River Ranch. Of those mentioned were Asian, African-American or black, Nigerian, Indian, Pakistani, Hispanic, Scottish-Australian, Scottish-Chinese, Scottish-Korean, South American, and Lebanese. Most of these were given as a single representative, a married couple or a family, not multiples. Hispanic, South American, and Lebanese were given as "I think" answers from one resident. The majority of respondents identified the same people as other respondents did, but many did not personally know those they mentioned.

The other half of respondents felt diversity in this area had not been achieved. One African-American woman interviewed said that she knew of only two other black residents besides her family. She went on to express that her family had encountered many inquiring and "surprised" stares, and questions from other residents. A black man acknowledged that while

there were residents of other races and ethnicities, the village was not diverse, stating “you still have less than a handful.”

As to why this might be, one hypothesis given by a black resident was “there is a perception that black folks live on the north side of town. If you move south, it’s considered selling out. That’s not the developers fault. People self-impose segregation.” Another suggested “what happens is a lot of Caucasian professionals live here because it’s the thing to do – a status kind of thing.” Others thought it had to do with expense, others said it was indicative of Lafayette or Louisiana as a whole, and still others replied that they did not know “but it’s not like we don’t let them in.”

The last goal, to achieve a long-term ecological doctrine, received the most “I don’t know” responses. Most were not aware that the development had been built in an effort to lessen environmental impact and preserve natural resources. Some thought about it and guessed that “maybe the green space” or “maybe because we are supposed to drive less” were things that would make the village environmentally sensitive.

Seven residents agreed that the ecological doctrine had been and still was being achieved. These were either residents who knew the developer or were realtors for the area.

Two residents disagreed, one saying, “the U.K. and Australia are much more environmentally sensitive. Lafayette needs to be far more aware of the environment.”

Upon interrogating the satisfaction level of the residents with their degree of privacy within River Ranch, a neighborhood with compact development and high densities, all but two replied that they were satisfied, some even saying it was not an issue. “It’s very social, but people respect your privacy,” responded one resident.

Several knew before hand how they might feel living in tight quarters and so purchased lots specifically for more privacy, either on a corner or across from a park. Having done so, they are comfortable with their level of privacy. A few subjects agreed that with such a tightly knit community, people often know your business. Privacy is not an issue for them because, they say, they take measures to secure it. One said, “I make choices to ensure that. Some people don’t. Your personal business can spread around fast here. I keep my business private.” This sentiment was also expressed in this way by another resident, “it’s hard for people to understand – you really have all the privacy you want to have.”

Two residents were moving off the square for more privacy and less visibility, one admitting, “privacy is tough. It’s definitely at a premium here.” One resident is moving out of River Ranch altogether to obtain more privacy, saying “everyone knows everyone’s business.”

There were many features listed by the residents as things they liked most about River Ranch, but the ones that got the large majority of mentions were the conveniences of having mixed uses, the community and people, and the pedestrian friendly atmosphere. Many loved that they could walk to get just about anything, even if they chose to drive instead. As several said, “we walk to get everything we need. Once Fresh Market opens, we won’t need to leave at all.”

People loved to talk about community in the village and the social aspect of life there. For them, community included how friendly everyone was, how many people they knew, the ability to rely on the neighbor, the opportunities to meet people, the opportunities to socialize with neighbors, and being able to sit on the porch or balcony and visit with neighbors.

One interesting example involved a recently divorced young woman. She described how in leaving her husband, she also lost her friends. She declared, “I would have needed much more counseling in my divorce if I had moved into a typical ‘brown carpet’ apartment. Here, I was immediately part of the community.”

Another illustration was related by a young woman. She recounted how in her childhood home, her family always had the doors open and people always came by to visit. In her previous, typical American suburban subdivision, she tried hard to develop the same atmosphere without success. In River Ranch, though, she reports

we open our doors and windows here. Our front door is always open. I’ll be cooking dinner and people will walk by, stop in and say ‘hi – what are you cooking? That smells so good!’ We’ll invite them to dinner and they’ll come back and bring wine. Sometimes we talk into the night.

Other stories are similar. Many residents talk about going to the Village Market just to visit. Others talk of meeting neighbors there or at a restaurant and being invited to join others or doing the inviting themselves. One said, “this is the most sociable neighborhood I’ve ever lived in!” Others recognize “this is not for everyone. This isn’t the place for you if you don’t like a lot going on!”

The next most mentioned qualities liked by the residents were the visually appealing nature of the village, both the landscape and architectural elements, the safety of the neighborhood, and the proximity of the City Club in that order.

Those elements that received roughly the same number of citations, although less than those above, included the benefits of a small garden, the neighborhood rules that “promote beauty and help maintain property values,” and the convenient location of River Ranch within Lafayette. One resident reported, “at first I wouldn’t build here because there are a lot of restrictions, but then I looked at the flip side. I realized that they apply to everyone, so it’s protective.”

Dislikes and ‘would like to see’ responses were few and varied. Still, roughly a quarter of subjects reported either disliking the elitist nature of the village or similarly, wishing there were more “different price points so that more people could live here.” Lack of parking, narrow streets, and relaxation of standards by the developer received the next largest mention.

Many people complained that there was not enough parking nearby for their visitors when they entertained. A homeowner with more than two cars must park on the street along with visitors. Several noted that with street parking and the narrow streets, it was difficult to maneuver through the neighborhood. However, when the concept of traffic calming was explained after the completion of the interview, most of these subjects appeared to be mulling this over, one saying “well, that’s good. I’m all for that. But maybe they can have parking on only one side of the street. That would help.”

Other complaints involved issues of privacy or needing more “elbow room,” the unrestricted use of golf carts, rising rent or fees, and the construction noise, trucks and detritus – although most acceded that this was temporary.

Other issues revealed themselves either during observations or during the interviews. Having noticed a number of golf carts in the village, I raised the topic in interviews and found it to be a contentious subject. Most agreed that golf carts were “okay,” although some did so reluctantly, but what they did see as a problem was the unrestricted use by minors, safety being their main concern. The complaints revolved around children without drivers’ licenses driving the carts with all of their friends piled in. According to the subjects, they were often speeding and did not follow the rules of the road. With too many kids piled in and no seatbelts, the residents saw a recipe for disaster. One woman was terrified she would hit a cart one day.

Three residents thought the golf carts were “ridiculous” and went against the concept of the village. They expressed almost identical sentiments, saying: “it’s a walkable neighborhood, so walk!”

Others felt the carts had a place in the village, admitting that those residents who lived in the back would have a far walk if they wished to go play tennis. One subject said the same, but then suggested they could ride bikes there. The other appropriate use put forth was as transportation for people with difficulty walking or the elderly.

The issue of safety in River Ranch was another topic often mentioned by the residents during the interviews. Many talked about how safe they felt walking around, even at night. Others expressed a certain relief at being able to let their children come and go on their own. But one mother said, “it’s almost too safe. People refer to it as a ‘bubble.’ You need to stay aware wherever you are.” Another expressed the same concern saying, “this neighborhood gives parents a false sense of security.”

Residents also brought up the perception of River Ranch by outsiders. This was perhaps the most contentious subject. The negative comments of outsiders that the subjects mentioned included the elite aspect of the neighborhood, the lack of diversity, shoddy construction, people living beyond their means, and rumors of foreclosures. Several subjects accused outsiders of being jealous. One man said, “why not live in a lovely neighborhood if you can afford it?”

A few were disappointed with the perception of the village because “when people find out you live in River Ranch, they have a preconceived idea of who you are.” Others agreed that the neighborhood is expensive, but as one stated “you pay more to live here, but you are paying for community and safety and security.”

One resident talked about comments she had heard from outsiders. “A lot of people talk about how people in River Ranch are living beyond their means and that there are a lot of foreclosures. But when you ask, no one can name a single person this has happened to.” With the current national mortgage crisis, it would be difficult to believe residents of the village were not also affected.

One resident maintained:

you have to have a lot of money to live here. There are a lot of foreclosures. I’m very good friends with a banker in town. He told me there were five foreclosures in one week in River Ranch. A friend from the electric company said River Ranch has the most cut-offs in Lafayette.

The rumors of shoddy construction were confirmed, at least in two instances, by two residents who personally experienced substandard construction techniques. One claimed that she knew of others experiencing similar problems and a couple of other residents reported hearing the same. Speculation about the reason for this revolved around the opinion that houses were being “thrown up” too fast and builders were taking short cuts. Some blamed the influx of potential residents into the area after Hurricane Katrina forced many to relocate from the New Orleans and Northshore areas, saying builders could not build fast enough to accommodate these people. Others maintained it was greed that prompted the quick construction. One resident noted a need for stricter controls.

Still, overall, seventy percent of the interview subjects agreed that, barring unforeseen circumstances, they did not intend to move from River Ranch, being very satisfied, and would age-in-place. “They will have to take me away in an ambulance or hearse,” reports one subject. Some senior apartment dwellers expressed concern about rising rents saying, “we’ll stay as long as we don’t get priced out!” A homeowner said he expects to move when older alleging, “you can pay up to \$10,000 a year in fees here. I don’t know how you’d do that on a fixed income.”

Three of the subjects speculated that they might move at some time for various reasons, including the same financial issue addressed above, wanting more space and the fact that “Lafayette is too small.” Two respondents had their houses up for sale and were actively in the process of moving. One reported moving due to changing neighborhood policies of which she disagreed, as well as a growing dislike of what she termed “developer tactics,” which included raising landscaping and liability insurance fees that residents were told would be covered in part by profits from the retail leases. A 100% increase in fees one year followed by another 50% increase the subsequent year was enough for her.

The other resident was moving for entirely different reasons. She originally was enamored with the village and convinced her husband to move the family in. After four months she put her house on the market and is moving back to her old neighborhood. She expressed dislike for the elite aspect of the neighborhood, saying

People think that if you live here, it gives you status. It’s to the point that I don’t even want to say I am from River Ranch! . . . I feel like I have to dress up just to walk in the neighborhood. And you better get dressed up to work out at the club .

. . . my old neighborhood was much more down to earth – you could wear t-shirts and shorts, it was completely different.

She also disliked the lack of privacy. “Everyone knows everyone’s business because you have to get your mail at the market . . . and the neighbors are too close.” She admits that this is a personal preference and notes that while the village is not for everyone, she knows most people love it.

Despite this, 94% of residents interviewed (32 of the 34) were satisfied to very satisfied with life in River Ranch. And one of the residents moving stated that she was satisfied overall, but did not like rising fees.

Discussion and Analysis

In this section I discuss how what the residents said and what was observed in the neighborhood, coalesce or not as the case may be. I examine where the two come together and where they split apart. I explore what it all might mean and what this information means to the goals of this thesis.

Given that observations were conducted by only one person, in many observation points, and during a period of 16 ½ days, it is clear that observation limitations exist and will affect the results. Sample bias due to snowball sampling could also play a role in the findings. To obtain more definitive findings would require a significantly larger investment of dedicated time, perhaps actually living in the neighborhood for a period of time, as well as having a larger sample of subjects. Splitting the job among several researchers would also help in gaining a clearer picture. Although I did spend the whole of each day in River Ranch, formally and informally observing, it remains that there would be gaps in knowledge about particulars that only a resident would see over time.

So what does this research mean? I embarked upon this project in an effort to determine how well River Ranch, as a new urbanist neighborhood, worked for its residents, what made it work or not, and how well the goals of the architect were implemented and accomplished. While this research is based on a small sample size and a defined observation area, I feel that the information revealed will help us start to understand the value of this traditional neighborhood development.

Considering the question of how this neighborhood works for its residents, one view is that River Ranch works very well for almost all of its residents. As noted previously, all but two

of the interview subjects reported being satisfied to very satisfied with the neighborhood and seventy percent said they would not move.

What about the bigger picture? Do TNDs in general work for people as a neighborhood? In the case of River Ranch, you could say the answer is that it works for the people who live there. That is to say that people not suited to the concept never move there in the first place. But this is beyond the scope of this project, so we must focus on those currently living in River Ranch who participated in the research and on the observations made, knowing that this is only part of the story.

TNDs were always meant to be offered as a choice, an option to live in a way different from the urban and suburban models of today. So we need to examine River Ranch as a neighborhood filled with people who choose to live there. Even those residents who were not familiar with the TND concept and moved into the village for other reasons, found themselves satisfied. One of the residents moving out freely admitted being satisfied with the development overall. It wasn't the development that was the problem for her, but the fee changes by management. The other departing resident acknowledged that "the people who live here love it," but it was not for her.

To investigate why the neighborhood works, we must first look at the architect's goals and how well they were accomplished because it is this that makes River Ranch different from the prevailing neighborhood building patterns in Louisiana. If his goals were not fully realized, does this make a difference for the satisfaction level of the residents? If some of the goals were not achieved, do the residents recognize that something is missing? If some of the goals were not achieved, but the neighborhood still works, are these goals that can be let go if the objective is to satisfy residents? This is the information we need if this research is to serve a feed-forward role.

So not only do we need to look at the goals from a planning standpoint, but we must then examine what the residents think about these goals and how they respond to them. Do the goals achieve the behavior and response to environment the architect intended? If the goals are achieved from a planning viewpoint, but do not work for the residents, we then know that our planning is flawed.

Community and Diversity

The architect, Steve Oubre, wanted to design a development that expressed the principles of New Urbanism. In 1997, he writes in the River Ranch Design Code:

River Ranch believes that our built environment not only affects the visual aspects of our life, but the patterns and types of choices we make as a result. . . Human response has been conditioned over the last fifty years to revolve around the automobile. While this has afforded great convenience, it has also managed to take the ‘humanness’ out of communities and civility out of our lives.

One of Oubre’s intentions was to create a neighborhood that fosters community. Community is a construct with elements and meanings that vary according to the individual. For Oubre, community is about neighbors knowing each other and being able to rely on each other. He mentions “providing places of purposeful assembly for social, cultural, and religious activities” but he also delineates the streets, sidewalks, and front porches as opportunities for informal social interaction. He posits that integration of age and economic class is necessary for authentic community (Architects Southwest 1997). In the April 8, 2007 issue of *The Sunday Advertiser*, Bob Moser quotes Oubre as saying “when you’re talking about community, it means a cross-section of society – it’s that significant . . . if you don’t have that cross-section, you don’t have community” (4A).

As we learned earlier, the residents of River Ranch interviewed, in aggregate, define community as a place where people know each other, are friendly and spend leisure time together; where you can go to your neighbor for help; where the people have common goals; and where you feel a sense of belonging. This is their experience in River Ranch.

Almost everyone mentioned that they liked the community facet of River Ranch. Residents reported that the expression of community occurred in many places around the village, including at the gym, CC’s, the restaurants, the market, the organized events, and on the street or front porches and gardens. Where community was observed was in all the places mentioned, but rarely seen on the street or porches and gardens as many mentioned. I only observed one couple consistently sitting on their porch day after day. Although not observed to the extent expressed, community, for the residents of River Ranch is very much a big part of why they enjoy living there. Community, as constructed by the residents, is by far the most successful of all of the original goals.

But Oubre intended more than this with his definition of community. What about the concept of community involving a cross-section of society? Most residents did not see diversity or equity in the socioeconomic make-up of the neighborhood population. Observations did not witness this either. Many worried that costs were excluding certain segments of the population.

Oubre admits that this is true. “In the beginning we wanted a fireman, a teacher to be able to live here. And it worked for about two years. In the third year it became too popular. We built a collector’s item.” Some residents expressed that they were fortunate to buy in at the beginning.

The demise of this goal was played out in the newspapers through the years. The September 3, 1997 issue of the *Times of Acadiana* yields this quote, “Neotraditionalism puts a premium on the diversity of incomes and ages within the development. Oubre and Daigle say they are determined to keep prices down . . . Residences will range from 1,200 square foot Creole cottages and townhomes priced at \$130,000 to sprawling riverfront mansions at the top end of the market” (Kurtz 1997:8).

In October of the same year, *The Daily Advertiser* reports lot prices from “\$35,000 to more than \$250,000” (Hurt 1997:1A). Assuming a construction cost per square foot of \$100, which is on the low end in our area, the smallest home being 1,200 square feet, and a minimum of \$35,000 for lot, that puts the \$130,000 figure in question. But those prices didn’t last long. A 1998 *Sunday Advertiser* article mentions lot prices ranging from \$56,000 to \$340,000 (O’Connor 1D).

In 1999, *Times of Acadiana* writer Broussard lists the low end lots starting at \$60,000. He writes, “River Ranch won’t attract every age group and income range, but the residents will represent a wider demographic than most of Lafayette’s neighborhoods” (20-21). By 2002, *House and Home* reports “The general price range for homes built in River Ranch spans from \$195,000 to well over \$1 million” (McClain 16).

Early 2007 figures have the Crescent apartments ranging from \$750 for a 538 sq. ft. studio to “from \$1475 for 1,222 sq. ft.” for a two bedroom two bath. To that add \$600 to \$800 a year in fees, or \$3860 to \$4060 a year in fees, if you have a pet, subscribe to high speed internet, and opt for a garage spot and storage facility. Carriage House Condominium Flats and Townhouses have flats that range from \$329,800 to \$820,100 (from 1055 to 2633 sq. ft.) and townhouses range from \$540,200 to \$589,400 (from 1753 to 1919 sq. ft.). A two bedroom, two and one-half bath cottage goes for over half a million. Single-family residences on the market during this research started in the upper \$400,000s and continued to over a million dollars. As Boyer says “another spatial utopia separated from economic realities” (1983: 197).

The April 8, 2007 *Sunday Advertiser* writes “Lafayette’s working class is being left behind by the local housing and rental market” (Moser 1A). Moser reports the difficulty qualified buyers have in finding housing in the \$75,000 - \$175,000 range. Of River Ranch, he concludes “when the market takes over, structuring a diverse community is secondary to profit” (2007:4A).

The residents’ views on the level of socioeconomic diversity could not be verified through observation alone, but the information above would seem to support the 76% of residents who agreed that the goal of socioeconomic diversity had not been achieved. What was interesting was the idea posited by some that socioeconomic diversity did exist simply because, “there are a lot of people here with a lot more money than us” as one resident put it. And in that sense, she is right, there is a mix of incomes. However, it was never the intention of the New Urbanists to build neighborhoods of exclusivity.

But can true socioeconomic diversity exist in a community in conjunction with resident satisfaction? Would the residents feel satisfied or very satisfied in this environment? Early neighborhood studies (Gans 1968, Lansing and Hendricks 1967, Keller 1968, Michelson 1970) showed that homogeneity, commonality, and social compatibility were critical in creating high neighborhood satisfaction levels among residents (Lansing et al. 1970:100-101). And as we saw from the interviews, commonality was mentioned as important to River Ranch residents for the sense of community they so valued. One subject specifically mentioned enjoying being able to celebrate the success of his neighbors. Another, despite stating that diversity was important, later mentioned not being “crazy about” having the apartments in River Ranch because of the transient nature of the residents. The apartments, while still expensive, do provide an opportunity for those of lesser incomes to be a part of the neighborhood.

While some residents specifically expressed a wish for more affordable housing in the village so “more people can live here,” the majority did not mention how they felt about the issue. Instead, they merely acknowledged that diversity did not exist. Getting at the importance of this goal to the residents is difficult. Rather than eliciting true feelings, a direct question to the subjects querying this importance would more likely yield questionable data due to the strong possibility that most subjects might choose to respond in a manner they think is acceptable. Insight into how important the residents feel this goal is must then be derived from other comments. Given that all residents agreed that commonality was crucial to community, and that

community was important to their life in River Ranch, it may be possible that achieving the goal of socioeconomic diversity is not important for neighborhood satisfaction. In fact, it may even be counterproductive.

Diversity also includes a population with a mix of racial and ethnic cultures represented. If the observations are to be believed, this goal has also failed, but residents were divided down the middle in their opinions about the success of this goal.

Racial or ethnic diversity levels within the community were difficult to determine through observation alone, especially ethnicity. However, my observations yielded extremely few people of color, which is consistent with the beliefs of half of the subjects. In fact, I had great difficulty finding any non-Caucasian residents to interview. Very few residents knew by name those of different races or ethnicities in the village, and those that did often referred me to the same people. One resident said, "It's bad when you can count them on the fingers of one hand."

The bar chart seen in Figure 1.1 shows the race/ethnicity breakdown of interview subjects only. However, I am personally aware of two others in the neighborhood that are not included on the chart, as I was unable to obtain interviews with them. In addition, four subjects amongst the 34 reported non-Caucasian spouses. Confirmation of the presence of some of the other ethnicities mentioned by residents was unattainable.

Caucasians represented 85 percent of those interviewed. The demographic figures for the city of Lafayette have the Caucasian population at about 64 percent. According to observation and anecdotal evidence, the 15 percent of residents of other races/ethnicities interviewed (plus non-Caucasian spouses) may be close to representing the total non-Caucasian population in the entire development. If you take the five non-Caucasian people interviewed and the four non-Caucasian spouses reported and then compare that to the total population of the neighborhood, the percentage of non-Caucasians drops significantly. Although not all occupied, there were at the time of this research, 800 single family homesites and 750 apartments and condominiums. However, being unable to obtain the demographic information for the neighborhood, the above information can only be considered speculation.

Of those interviewed who perceived a disconnect in diversity levels, a few were okay with level. One resident said, "I'm fine with it. But you can always do better."

Most, though, expressed concerns regarding exclusion. One young Caucasian woman reported “I think it is important to be around people with different backgrounds and ethnicities. I chose my child’s daycare for this.”

While more subjects agreed that socioeconomic diversity did not exist in River Ranch, fewer felt the same was true of the racial/ethnic diversity. Fifty percent of respondents felt this goal had been achieved. Are the Caucasian residents so used to living amongst other Caucasians that the presence of only a few non-Caucasians represents a diverse community to them?

Perhaps part of the disagreement as to the achievement of this goal is due to semantics or how each person defines diversity. Four of the 17 who agreed diversity existed in River Ranch gave “yes, but not representative” types of answers. At what point is the mix of people considered diverse?

There is another interesting question raised here. Why did more people readily see the relatively homogenous nature of the socioeconomic composition of residents than they did the racial/ethnic inequities? Does sample bias again play a part? Is having people of different races and ethnicities living in one community more acceptable when they are in the same income bracket, especially at the higher levels? Does it all begin to fall apart when both true socioeconomic and racial diversity are present? It may be that the existence of true diversity will fracture the common links amongst residents that contributes to a sense of community. If so, then how important is this goal of diversity for neighborhood satisfaction?

The integration of different age groups does seem to be one objective that has been fairly well accomplished from both the planner’s and the residents’ perspective. A mix of ages does exist, however observations and some interview results did show a larger population of those of mid-adult age. Additionally, observations saw fewer young adults represented, whether singles, couples, or families. The majority of residents, though, believed that people of all ages lived in River Ranch. How long the mix will be maintained is yet to be seen, as many think young adults and seniors are being priced out of the neighborhood.

Oubre’s wish for a cross-section of society in River Ranch is only partially achieved. But the question of whether this matters to the residents and whether planners

should endeavor to more fully achieve this goal is unresolved. Some residents were happy with the status quo, some wished for improvement. But none said they would move because of it. This is the age old question for planners. People tend to like being with people like themselves. As one black resident put it, “people self impose segregation.” So, is pushing equity pointless? As Gans noted, homogeneity or shared attitudes and general compatibility of residents was key in neighborhood satisfaction (Lansing et al. 1970:101,102).

Mixed Uses and Walkability

Another objective of the architect was to provide mixed uses with services and parks within walking distance. All residents agreed unequivocally that the architect had succeeded in this goal, whether they walked or not and whether or not they used the services or parks. A walk through the neighborhood confirms retail, offices, and services with residential above in the town center. Parks are found all through the development within a five-minute walk from any residence.

It must be noted that this is a multi-faceted goal that is intended to affect several outcomes. The components of this goal are interrelated and interdependent. For instance, one aim of providing mixed uses with services and parks within walking distance is to encourage people to walk more and drive less. Walking more and driving less has two potential positive impacts – that of improving public health through increased activity and improving the state of the environment through decreased auto emissions, reduced impermeable paving for parking needs, reduced presence of fluid leakage from the parked cars and the resulting run-off, and reduced paving for new roads or road-widening. It could also be said to positively affect our homeland security through reduced dependence on foreign oil.

So, as noted above, the design of a New Urbanist neighborhood is said to promote walking and reduce driving. The success of this goal of the architect of River Ranch is difficult to assess through observation, since most jobs and all schools are located outside of the development, necessitating a large number of cars travelling on a regular basis in the village. That said, the interview was designed to help verify any claims of walking more and driving less through cross-questioning, although without any comparisons, no definitive conclusions can be made. These questions elicited remarks, such as one

resident's "well, I work here now, so I don't have to use my car for that. I can just walk there," or another's "even though I work here, I still need my car for business . . . so I drive."

The interviews did reveal that residents who maintained that they walked more and drove less appeared to walk often and use their car little, but we cannot know for sure how this compares to their behavior in previous neighborhoods. And while most residents agreed that they walked more in River Ranch than in previous neighborhoods they lived in and that they used their car less, how much less and what the impacts truly are, are the questions. Vehicular counts within River Ranch were still high.

As to the improved public health component of this goal, the majority of residents reported walking, jogging or biking in the neighborhood. Almost all of these stated that exercise was a part of why they did. This is consistent with what was observed. As noted earlier, the majority of those seen engaging in these activities seemed to be doing so for purposeful exercise.

Residents' claims in this area did seem to be borne out through the cross-questioning, but not in observations. Observations revealed very few people out and about on foot or bike, and a large amount of vehicular traffic (excluding recognized construction-related vehicles.) The greatest amount of traffic seen was in the town center area, which it must be noted, is also an area visited by people outside of the development. However, one Arabella Boulevard park observation also saw a large number of cars and all of the park observations saw more cars than people, regardless of time of day or day of the week.

It is possible that the discrepancy between what was reported and what was observed is due to inaccuracies, consciously or unconsciously, in self-reporting. Another point to consider is whether snowball sampling tainted the data and resulted in interviews with some of the more active residents in the community, i.e., active residents know other active residents.

But in order to get people to walk more and drive less, we must first create a pedestrian friendly environment conducive to walking, otherwise known as walkability. Observations indicated that Oubre has produced a pedestrian friendly environment. Pedestrian safety and comfort are emphasized through wide sidewalks (five feet to eight feet); green space buffers between sidewalk and street; traffic calming measures such as narrower, tree-lined streets, street parking, and sharper turning radii at street corners; and many driveways off alleys to the rear of residences so as not to cross sidewalks.

While interrogating the residents on the walking environment of the village, many commented that using the street was easier than using the sidewalks because of construction materials and debris. This was confirmed in many places through my walking circuit. While this is recognized as a temporary condition, for some it has been present for eight years. This may or may not be important as residents did not express having a problem or disliking walking in the street.

Three residents said there were no places to sit and rest along their route. In the areas between Worth and Richland, there are several parks with benches. My observations noted only one senior with a baby in a stroller stopping in a park to sit and rest for a moment. Between Worth, the river, and West Martial Avenue, what is referred to by the residents as “the back,” seating is scarce to nonexistent.

In addition, although there were many driveways off alleys, it was observed that front-loaded lots did exist, a potential safety hazard for those on the sidewalk. The architect explained that at the time, it was necessary economically and logistically to permit some front-loaded drives. To mitigate the effect, driveways were not to exceed 12 feet. The developer allowed twenty-four foot drives, but has recently begun enforcing the original code. No resident mentioned this as a problem.

Street parking and narrow roads were a complaint for some residents when they drove, however they fulfill their intent as traffic calming devices. One resident protested that she had to slow down [in her car] when maneuvering through the streets of the neighborhood.

Sidewalk complaints regarded management issues, although three residents felt the sidewalks “could be wider.” Despite these comments, many residents talked about how pleasant walks through the neighborhood are.

Embedded within this goal is providing a safe environment in which people feel comfortable walking. Many people talked of feeling safe in River Ranch, and many parents felt comfortable letting their children roam unsupervised. Children, alone or in groups, were observed many times about the neighborhood, appearing to confirm the residents’ statements. Overall, residents were satisfied with the walkability of River Ranch.

Another component of this mixed-use multi-faceted goal is the intent to provide, within the boundaries of the village, and within walking distance, for the daily needs of the residents. Albert Mehrabrian comments that a ‘true community’ in ecological terms, must contain “all the

main activities of life, including one of the most important, food gathering or its equivalent,” and “making a living” (1976:312).

The town center is certainly walkable from the houses in my study area. A walk from the development’s edge houses to the town center is also doable, but may be a little far for some.

Walking from the east side of Camellia Boulevard to the town center and the square is aided by a pedestrian tunnel beneath the boulevard. Again, edge house residents would probably find it quite a long walk. Residents on the east side did complain about the inconvenience involved in getting their mail at the Village Market. However, the Main Street area, the east side’s answer to the west’s town center is still being developed and may mitigate this problem.

In observations of the Village Market, CC’s, and Café Roma, it was clear that the three eateries did significantly more business than the retail. This corresponded with residents’ remarks. All reported using at least one of the eateries on a regular basis, while many said they rarely or never used the retail. This has implications for the goal of providing “services within walkable distance.”

As for providing parks within walking distance, this has been done. While the parks are within walking distance, the reports of park usage seem consistent with what was observed, with Ellington and Preservation parks being utilized the most and five of the eight parks in my observation area rarely, if ever, used. Is this important? Perhaps it is the perception of choice that is important. The parks are there if you wish to use them, but you do not have to. Just having the choice provides satisfaction. In addition, residents reported enjoying the aesthetic aspect of the parks and the value they add by contributing to the beauty of the neighborhood.

Continuing with Mehrabrian’s assertions of what makes a true community, very few residents could make their living in River Ranch (unless most telecommuted), although seven of those interviewed did work in the village. A few of those had offices or businesses, but most were involved in real estate and development within the neighborhood.

Early plans for River Ranch called for a dry cleaner, video store, and regional supermarket. “The community will resemble a small town, complete with library, church, daycare and bank,” writes Lisa Hurt in a 1997 *Daily Advertiser* article (6A). *House and Home* reports “a 42-acre parcel of land that fronts Kaliste Saloom . . . will provide the residents with a national drug store, a regional supermarket, an emergency medical facility, banking and restaurant choices. A transportation system is also on the horizon to further accommodate the

residents for ease of passage to outlying areas” (McLain 2002:18). An inn, boutique hotel, and upscale department store were also planned.

The library and church never made it in and there are no known plans to do so. Three churches are within five miles of the development, but none within it and none within walking distance. The video store moved out and many residents reported missing it. Though the Village Market carries some necessities, the residents all stated that they did their main grocery shopping out of the neighborhood. All were looking forward to Fresh Market, a regional supermarket, opening later this year in River Ranch. Most residents agreed that they will drive to the Fresh Market and that it was “too scary” to walk to the CVS pharmacy because of traffic on Camellia Boulevard.

As far as a transportation system, there is talk in the development office of a trolley within the neighborhood. Those residents who mentioned this said it would be nice and that they may not have to use their car as much if they had a trolley. There is a city bus stop almost directly across Camellia Boulevard from the town center, on the east side. The discussion of public transit was outside of the scope of this research.

Success of this goal is mixed. As noted above, providing all services needed by the residents and doing so at walkable distances does not seem possible. According to the developer’s office, some of the shops in the Crescent apartments would be moving across Camellia Boulevard to the new Main Street area of the village where a larger retail center is located. Insufficient parking (the apartments and retail share parking) and lack of visibility were given as the reasons for relocation and the intention is to replace them with office units. This would relocate these businesses even further away from the residents on the west side.

Obviously River Ranch has not provided the true community that Mehrabrian talks about. People do have to leave the village to make a living, go to church, take their children to school and more. A finite amount of land dictates how much can be offered. As development continues, the village becomes more spread out. Services closely available for some residents become further away for others. Those residents who felt they would never have to leave the neighborhood once Fresh Market opened were retired, did not work, or did not work outside River Ranch.

All of these components mentioned above combine to create the real goal of walking more and driving less. If the goal of driving less is achieved, is the aim of improving air quality

in a significant way by reducing auto emissions really something that these neighborhoods can accomplish? In the case of River Ranch, no, not without the support of a good public transportation system to ferry residents to those locations and services outside the village mentioned above. And does this goal of walking more actually impact public health through easing the current obesity crisis and thereby reducing incidence of heart disease, diabetes, and the numerous other obesity-related illnesses? Even then, while the intent and opportunity may be there, how many residents would take advantage of it and how many would prefer their car?

In a study published in the winter 2006 issue of the *Journal of the American Planning Association*, Frank et al. found walkability and mixed uses to be associated with a decrease in body mass index and the emissions of volatile organic compounds, stating “these results connect development patterns with factors that affect several prevalent chronic diseases” (75). In another study published in the September 2003 issue of the *American Journal of Health Promotion*, researchers were able to show a clear association between the type of place people live and their activity levels, weight and health. As might be expected, dense, walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods were associated with higher activity levels, lower weights, and better health. The reverse correlation was also found (O’Keefe 2004:2).

Further, a Georgia Institute of Technology study, “Obesity Relationships with Community Design, Physical Activity, and Time Spent in Cars,” published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, showed that “people who live in neighborhoods with a mix of shops and businesses within easy walking distance are 7 percent less likely to be obese, lowering their relative risk of obesity by 35 percent” (Becker 2004).

Still, critics say these results are due to the fact that active people choose to live in these types of neighborhoods. However, a study by Handy et al. finds that while yes, people do self-select these neighborhoods if they prefer walking, it also finds the possibility that the built environment does have a causal effect on walking behavior (2006:55-74). The authors state, “changes to the built environment that increase the opportunities for walking may in fact lead to more walking” (70).

The Ecological Doctrine

These last goals relate to another objective of the architect, that of a long-term ecological doctrine. Observations noted illustrations of an environmentally sensitive strategy in the planning of the village. However, resident activity is also part of this and systems put in place,

such as the walkability elements and operable windows, cannot work without their participation. The required sun screening devices, however, will help to mitigate energy usage without requiring purposeful action on the part of the resident.

The green spaces, compact development patterns, infill development, and the preservation and optimization of natural resources are all examples of this doctrine. Natural contours of the land and natural systems of water drainage were respected. The lake was preserved and expanded for retention ponds, although fountains are arguably not the most ecological choice. Many of the old trees were saved and I have seen them actively protected from construction activities. Additional trees were planted and continue to be planted. Trees are replaced as needed. While I agree with one resident who pronounced that we need to be a lot more environmentally sensitive, this development has at least taken the first step.

What was the response to this objective by the residents? As noted in the previous section, most residents were unaware of the environmental sensitivity intended. None reported it as a reason for moving to the development. This lack of environmental awareness is systemic, though, reaching far beyond River Ranch.

What the residents did notice, and did appreciate, was the by-product of some of these actions – the aesthetic side of the environmental measures. They all thought River Ranch was beautiful, remarking on the beauty the parks and green spaces brought to the village and stating that they loved looking at the architecture. The success of this goal is difficult to measure, but I believe it has been achieved.

Sense of Place

Lastly, I consider the intention to have River Ranch display a sense of place architecturally, yet be diverse in its building types and styles. Observations saw incongruities in the achievement of this goal. While many were happy, one-third of those residents interviewed remarked that the developer was straying from this concept. All of these residents were not happy with the changes.

Whether the architect succeeded in achieving a sense of place in the village was contentious, as mentioned earlier. However, this is a difficult one to determine, as the architect is only one of the people involved. His intention and the actual execution could differ.

What was observed is that while the earlier portions of the development are appropriate to the area, some of the later areas display styles inconsistent, even incongruous, with Acadiana.

In addition, the urban models are more Caribbean in style, which while not vernacular to the area, are styles that influenced building in south Louisiana, especially the New Orleans area. Some residents' comments concurred, while others felt sense of place had been achieved.

Further discussion with the architect yielded more information on this topic. In the architectural code, porches were optional beyond the five-minute pedestrian shed from the town center. Edge lots were allowed more leeway, including the ability to block their houses from the street with stone or brick fences to add contrast and "make it feel less orchestrated." As the edge lots have larger setbacks, "the public dialogue common on more interactive streets" is not possible. Oubre does note that the concept was used far beyond the level intended.

As to those residents who said they thought River Ranch looked like New Orleans, Oubre explains, "the original architectural code allowed for Acadian and Creole styles only. However, there was little urban context to pull from." According to Oubre, marketing was responsible for the New Orleans influence.

In addition, the developer wished to include the Mediterranean style, although the architect argued against it, stating "harsh massing" (less-inviting, block-like, more monolithic structures with flatter façades) and "lack of environmental qualities" (features incongruent with the character and energy-efficient function of vernacular architecture). To bridge the Mediterranean style with the Acadian and Creole, Oubre brought in Caribbean architecture. Departures from these styles were the choice of the developer. According to Oubre, the developer is returning to the original concepts in developing the new acreage. But the damage is already done. The partial implementation of this goal has left many dissatisfied in this area.

In all, while maybe not quite the sense of place the architect intended, River Ranch does have a cohesive look that identifies it. With the exception of one resident, all agreed that there was sufficient diversity in building types and styles to create interest and avoid homogeneity.

Privacy

While not a stated goal of the architect, privacy comes into play with both community and compact development and is a crucial psychological need of humans. Privacy is another element that cannot easily be determined through observation in this type of environment, but the sociability aspect of the neighborhood observed and then informed about in interviews, provided some insight. The unconscious revelations residents made during interviews regarding the

activities of their neighbors were added clues. Despite the compact development, the majority of residents reported they were satisfied with their level of privacy.

Some acknowledged that the neighborhood was not for everyone. Every resident I spoke with, with one exception, were gregarious, social people. The one resident who wished for greater privacy was moving out. It does appear that people who have a strong need for privacy, and perhaps, a more introverted personality, would not be comfortable here.

One reason it is difficult to evaluate the value of New Urbanism is because the concepts of the TNDs are often not implemented fully by the architect or, more often, the developer. Through examining both the goals of the architect, conducting observations, and evaluating the residents' responses to their environment, these discrepancies can become visible. The quest then, is to determine, as I am attempting to do here, what goals are important to the residents and in what form are they important – fully realized or partially implemented?

As this section illuminates, the statements of the residents interviewed could not always be confirmed through observation. In some cases it was not feasible, in others, the two were at odds. The measure of achievement of the architect's goals is summarized in Table 3.2 on the following page.

As to which of these goals is important to the residents, this can be determined through examining the 'likes and dislikes' about the neighborhood reported by the subjects. The goals of mixed uses with services and parks within walking distance and of sense of community would appear to be the most important according to resident responses. The convenience of having mixed-uses available, the sense of community, and the pedestrian-friendly environment were aspects of River Ranch that residents reported liking the most. Among those aspects mentioned second include safety and having the City Club, also part of the goals above.

The visually appearing nature of both the architecture and landscape was also mentioned among the 'likes' in second place. Again, this implies the importance of the mixed uses with services and parks, as well as the goals of sense of place, diverse building types and styles, and indirectly, environmental sensitivity.

Very few 'dislikes' of River Ranch were mentioned, and only by some residents. The importance of socioeconomic diversity and sense of place can be inferred through the 'dislike' statements involving the elite aspect of the village and wanting to see more variety in price

points, as well as a dislike that the developer relaxed the architectural standards. Seven people reported the first ‘dislike’ and six the second. This again raises the question of whether the pursuit of diversity is important for creating neighborhood satisfaction, as barely 21% made mention of it.

| Goal | Residents’ View of Achievement | Author’s View of Achievement (according to TND concepts) |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|
| Mixed Uses w/ Services and Parks in Walking Distance | 100% Yes | Partial |
| Sense of Community | 94% Yes 6% No | Yes |
| Mix of Ages | 82% Yes 18% No | Yes |
| Sense of Place | 12% Yes 3% No 85% Mixed | Partial |
| Diverse Building Types and Styles | 97% Yes 3% No | Yes |
| Socioeconomic Diversity | 24% Yes 76% No | No |
| Racial and Ethnic Diversity | 50% Yes 50% No | No |
| Environmental Sensitivity | 21% Yes 6% No 73% Don’t Know | Yes |

Table 3.2: Results.

What this data means for the performance of River Ranch for its residents and for future neighborhood planning is discussed in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER FOUR CONCLUSION

What can architects and planners take with them from this research? If River Ranch represents a typical TND, then we must realize that this type of neighborhood can be only one of many planning options. It is not necessarily the new model that should be applied everywhere. As expressed repeatedly by the residents, this type of living is not for everyone.

But this does not mean that the TND should not be pursued. According to this research, almost all residents were happy. What makes it work for the residents of River Ranch? The fulfillment of the elements that create community is one ingredient – compact development (or propinquity – nearness of neighbors), meeting places, walkability, front porches, places for staged events. In addition, they liked the feeling of safety that comes with a close knit community. Indeed, Bell et al. reports: “researchers have established that the availability of informal places for socializing with neighbors helps build a sense of community and is associated with lower crime rates . . . designers are now introducing front porches . . . in order to encourage residents to socialize” (2001:2).

Although many residents did not view the walkability of River Ranch as an environmental measure, they did see it as another amenity and as a possibility to avoid fighting traffic in the city as often. Mixed uses and services were greatly appreciated with the market, CC’s, the restaurants, and the gym being the most utilized. Parks and green spaces were prized, whether utilized or not, for aesthetic reasons, as was the architecture, although sense of place fell prey to partial implementation.

Interestingly, Burgess maintains that mixing land uses and increasing densities in low- to moderate-income areas results in “disinvestment and deterioration” (1996:235). Why, then, does it appear from this research that these elements work so well and add value in high-income communities?

It is acknowledged that River Ranch has high price points in their housing stock, as well as the type of retail this population would support. It is also noted that the mixed uses and higher densities are concentrated in specific areas, not spread throughout as in the urban communities that so inspired New Urbanism. New Urbanists would claim that this provides choice.

Sugar Mill Pond, another TND project of the River Ranch Development Company, is intended to be more affordable. If this intent holds, will it succumb to Burgess’s claims, or

mimic the success of River Ranch? We may not find out, as Oubre predicts that the same market forces that drove affordability out of the village will do the same in Sugar Mill Pond. Indeed, in a survey of 234 market-rate TNDs, Emily Talen, co-chair of the Affordable Housing Initiative of the Congress for the New Urbanism, found the housing “incredibly unaffordable” (Walker 2007:1).

And so, as we saw in River Ranch, full implementation of socioeconomic, cultural, and ethnic diversity was not accomplished. What may be that the biggest challenge for River Ranch is its own success. Katz puts it eloquently

so the rich, who can choose, choose community, or at least its image. How much more must the poor, who must depend upon it for their lives, want community? If Seaside and the others cannot in the end offer viable models for that, they will remain entirely beautiful but rather sad (1994:230).

At least for the time being, it seems the market will rule as demand for New Urbanist neighborhoods far exceeds supply. Barring developer incentives, public subsidies and percentage requirements for affordable units, how will young adults and seniors ever live alongside their parents and each other in neighborhoods like River Ranch as the architect envisioned? Where will the social, cultural, and economic diversity come from that is deemed necessary for community sustainability?

But these are planners’ dreams. Is diversity something the residents want? This question is unanswered. As environmental psychologists, we are taught to determine not only the physical and physiological requirements of the user of a space, but also the cultural and psychological ones. Although there was disagreement among the residents as to the diversity levels in River Ranch, (some wishing for more, others satisfied with the level) almost all reported being happy living in River Ranch. So what effect has lack of diversity actually had on the residents? What would be the response if River Ranch suddenly became truly diverse?

As earlier studies showed, homogeneity seems to be a critical requirement for neighborhood satisfaction. The River Ranch residents’ own definitions of community, so important to their satisfaction, included common goals among the residents. Then there is the prescient comment of one resident about people choosing to self-segregate. Sies and Silver report that even after the Fair Housing Act of 1968 “African Americans still made up only 6 percent of suburban residents nationwide in 1980; a substantial portion of these families settled

in race- or class-segregated suburban enclaves” (1996:467). Was this by intention? (Of course choice is only one factor in this housing debate, and not everyone has similar choices.)

Is this a reality that we as planners cannot accept? Do residents really wish to live in neighborhoods only with residents like themselves? Environmental psychologists stipulate that as designers we should design strictly for the needs and desires of the user. It is only in this way that we can create more humane environments. As controversial as it may seem, does this mean we build neighborhoods for residents who have social, cultural, and economic similarities? Are we wasting our time pursuing diversity? Will residents create their own social constructions of their neighborhoods despite our best efforts? And what are the implications for neighborhood sustainability if diversity is not present? As Duany et al. say “further experience will no doubt modify the precepts and techniques of the New Urbanism, but that is as it should be” (2000:260). What should those modifications be?

This research, while providing insight into some of the issues investigated, also produced profound questions. Much more research needs to be conducted, not just in this neighborhood, but in other TNDs, as well as in non-new urbanist communities. The environmental psychology aspects of neighborhoods must be further investigated if we are to successfully build for the needs and desires of the users, and the data bank of POEs for neighborhood designs must be expanded.

Is this research transferable? Further research is the best way to determine the relevance of these findings to other settings. While concrete answers cannot be given here, this research, from limited observations and data, is offered as a start.

As to the discourse surrounding the TND, planners may wonder if we are just reinventing the homogeneity and social exclusion these neighborhoods were created to prevent. Environmental psychologists, though, may wonder if this is what people want.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

University Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research

University of New Orleans

Campus Correspondence

Renia Ehrenfeucht
Elizabeth Tomlinson
Math 337

5/17/2007

RE: The Village of River Ranch: A post-occupancy evaluation of a traditional
neighborhood development

IRB#: 05mar07

The IRB has deemed that the research and procedures are compliant with the
University of New Orleans and federal guidelines.

Please remember that approval is only valid for one year from the approval date. Any
changes to the procedures or protocols must be reviewed and approved by the IRB
prior to implementation.

If an adverse, unforeseen event occurs (e.g., physical, social, or emotional harm), you
are required to inform the IRB as soon as possible after the event.

Best of luck with your project!
Sincerely,

Laura Scaramella, Ph.D.
Chair, University Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

When did you move here?

What were you looking for when you moved?

Where did you move from? (Type of housing)

What influenced your decision to move to River Ranch?

How satisfied are you? What do you like? What don't you like?

How many people live in your household? How many cars?

When River Ranch was developed, the developers intended it to be inclusive, 1) have mixed uses with services and parks within walking distance, 2) have a sense of community where neighbors know each other, 3) have people of all ages as residents, 4) have a sense of place architecturally, 5) yet be diverse in the building types, and carry out a 6) long-term social doctrine

How does this compare with where you have lived in the past?

Are you comfortable with the level of diversity? If not, why not?

Why do you think the level of diversity is where it is?

7) long-term ecological doctrine.

[Ask about each goal specifically, example: Is it diverse? In what ways?]

Another goal of these neighborhoods is to reduce/limit the negative environmental impacts of land development by compact building practices and by providing open land and green spaces. Was this environmental sensitivity a consideration for you when choosing RR as a place to live?

Some people say that to have a pleasant walking experience within a neighborhood you must have trees for shade, benches to rest along the way, that the walker feels safe from traffic, and that the walker not feel overshadowed by the buildings. Does this describe River Ranch?

How often do you walk?

When you walk, do you walk for pleasure, exercise, or to a destination?

How does this compare with other places you've lived?

Did any of these influence your decision to move to River Ranch?

Can you walk me through your day yesterday? Where did you go? How did you get there?

[Make sure to determine if they parked somewhere and then carried out errands by walking to avoid undercounting pedestrian trips.]

Is that pretty typical? [Ask why or why not]

Are weekends different? [Why or why not?]

Do you visit parks in the area? Which do you visit most often? Why do you use those?

How often do you visit parks in River Ranch?

If they don't use River Ranch parks often, clarify why.

How many people do you know on your block by name?

How did you meet each one?

How often do you see each other? Where? [socialize, run into each other on the street, stores, parks]

Do you sit outside? In front or in back?

Would you like to know more of your neighbors?

What does the phrase “sense of community” mean to you? Do you feel that here in River Ranch?

Where do you usually shop? What do you like about that shopping area?

[If not in River Ranch] How often to you go to the shops in River Ranch?

Are you happy with the level of privacy you have? Would you like more?

Do you see yourself aging-in-place here? Why or why not?

Anything else you would like to add? Can you recommend others to talk to?

Can I get some basic information about you?

Sex:

Male Female

Marital Status:

Single Married

Age Range:

18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64
 65-74 75 or older

Race/Ethnicity (optional):

Housing type:

Apartment Live/Work Unit Townhouse Sideyard House
 Courtyard House Detached House Front Court House

Owner or Renter:

Owner Renter

Occupation:

Family income range (annual, before taxes, in dollars):

Below 20,000 20,000-29,999 30,000-49,999 50,000-69,999
 70,000-99,999 100,000-249,999 250,000-499,999
 500,000 – 599,999 Greater than 1,000,000

Highest level of education completed:

High school Vocational training Some college

College graduate Some graduate school Masters Ph.D.
 Professional degree

Thank you very much for participating.

APPENDIX C
Schedule of Observations

| | Before 8:00 a.m. | 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. | 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. | 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. | 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. | 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m. | 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. |
|-----------|------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Monday | WC | PPk | | | | | |
| | PPk | | | WPk | EPk | | BPk |
| Tuesday | CC | WC | | | | | |
| | WC | PPk | | | | | |
| Wednesday | | CC | | | CC | | |
| | | WC | | | CR | | |
| Thursday | | | | | | | WrPk |
| Friday | | | PG | | VM | VM | |
| | | | | APk | TS | TS | APk |
| | | | | WrPk | | | |
| Saturday | | | CC | PG | | VM | PG |
| | | | CC | TS | | TS | |
| Sunday | | WC | | | CR | | PPk |
| | | CC | WC | PPk | CC | | |
| | 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. | 3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. | 4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. | 5:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. | 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. | 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. | 8:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. |
| Monday | | | CC | PPk | | | |
| | BPk | | CR | | | | |
| Tuesday | | | | | | | |
| Wednesday | | IC | | VM | | | |
| Thursday | WrPk | PG | | | TS | | |
| | | PG | | | TS | | |
| Friday | | | EPk | WC | | | |
| Saturday | PG | WrPk | WPk | PPk | WC | PPk | |
| Sunday | PPk | | CC | | | | |
| | | | CR | | | | |

LEGEND

- BPk Bradbury Crossing Park
- CC CC's Community Coffee House
- WC Walking Circuit
- PPk Preservation Park
- WPk Winslow Park
- EPk Ellendale Park
- CR Café Roma
- PG Ellington Park Playground
- VM Village Market
- APk Arabella Park
- WrPk Windsor Park
- IC Scoop's Ice Cream Shop
- TS Town Square

VITA

Elizabeth Tomlinson is a resident of Baton Rouge and received her B.A. in Marketing from Southeastern Louisiana University and a B.I.D. (Bachelor of Interior Design) from Louisiana State University. In her first semester in design, the author discovered an interest in social design research and how the study of the built environment and behavior could help create better designers, architects, landscape architects, and urban planners. Her internship and work in the field after graduation expanded her design interests to include all disciplines of the built environment. After three years in the field, Ms. Tomlinson decided to pursue a master's degree in urban studies at the University of New Orleans.

Familiar with the Smart Growth movement, New Urbanism, and Traditional Neighborhood Developments, Ms. Tomlinson became interested in how well these relatively new planning models worked for their residents. She chose to conduct a post occupancy evaluation of the Village of River Ranch located in nearby Lafayette, Louisiana for her thesis study. As a graduate student in urban studies with an interest in anthropology, sociology, and environmental psychology, the author was in a unique position to observe and explore the phenomenon of the Traditional Neighborhood Development through the study of River Ranch and its residents.