cornerstones of the plan 3

While there are several features and institutions that make the Midtown area unique, there are basic planning principles that apply to all of America's great cities. Lynchburg is one of those great cities. It has a very strong and sound history of excellent planning. From the charrette, four of the foundations in planning were validated and reinforced for Midtown. This chapter describes the four principles; specific design components of each principle are further detailed and illustrated in Chapter 4. General guidance on implementing each principle is included; specific implementation strategies can be found in Chapter 6.

CORNERSTONES OF THE PLAN

I. Neighborhoods

II. Great Streets

III. Preserve and Connect

IV. Start Now, Together

The Illustrative Master Plan at right was created during the charrette. The plan synthesizes community ideas and depicts the idealized build-out for Midtown. This map is for illustrative purposes and is not a regulating document. The Illustrative Master Plan identifies key opportunity parcels for potential development, redevelopment, conservation, and preservation. A large copy of the plan is included in Appendix A and is on display at City Hall.

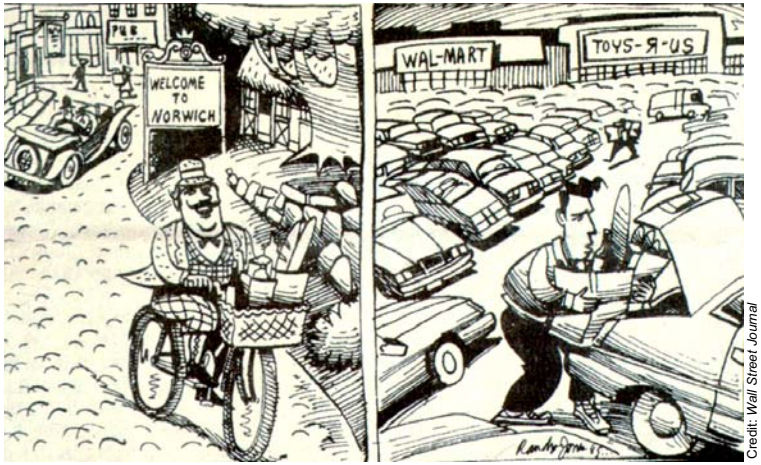
I. NEIGHBORHOODS

Neighborhoods are the glue that hold Lynchburg together. The city has a variety of classic, historic neighborhoods and these neighborhoods contribute to Lynchburg's identity. Midtown contains several neighborhoods, primarily located adjacent to Miller Park. Sidewalks line the grid of streets which form relatively small, intimate blocks. Houses range in size, providing for a variety of housing options.

As Midtown continues to evolve, these existing neighborhoods must be respected, maintained, and restored. Where infill opportunities exist, every opportunity should be maximized to reflect the character of Midtown's existing historic neighborhoods. Its streets connect and blocks are small. Houses are located close to the street, with sidewalks and street trees wherever possible. These lasting qualities should be applied as new neighborhoods emerge and old neighborhoods grow more complete.

As we look to the future of Midtown, it is important to encourage and provide more opportunities for people to live in the area. Lynchburg's neighborhoods traditionally have had a mix of uses and types of buildings. A variety of uses within the neighborhood creates the ability to live, work, shop and have daily needs and services within walking distance. It is time for Midtown Lynchburg to become a primary, first-choice residential option. Encouraging a balance of people living and working in Midtown has several benefits, including: less daily trips that rely on the regional road network; increased support for local businesses; and, new and historic housing can provide a greater variety of housing options for Lynchburg. The Illustrative Master Plan identifies specific sites for residential and mixed-use infill development.

Housing for a mix of incomes must be provided in Midtown. A variety of building types allows for a diversity of family sizes, ages, and incomes to live in the same neighborhood. Midtown should not be just a place for the richest of the rich and poorest of the poor. It is a place for everyone, and should support a diverse population from every income level. To reach the best possible spectrum of residents, Midtown living should be promoted simultaneously to all incomes - modest, middle, and high incomes. This mix of incomes is essential to securing a socially and economically balanced community.



Credit: *Wall Street Journal*

Cartoon depicting traditional neighborhoods and conventional development.

NEIGHBORHOODS — GETTING THERE

The following steps are necessary in creating lasting Midtown neighborhoods:

a. Amend the City's Zoning Code and create a Form Based Code specific to Midtown to protect and enhance the character of Midtown's neighborhoods and to return to traditional planning principles reflective of Lynchburg planning.

b. Where applicable, designate neighborhoods as Historic Districts and encourage residents and property owners to use Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits to rehabilitate historic structures.

c. Develop a rehabilitation / adaptive re-use strategy as a mechanism to create additional housing options in Midtown that meet contemporary housing needs.

d. Create an infill development strategy to better maximize land and to provide opportunities for mixed-use development in Midtown.

e. Conduct an annual inventory of land uses to compare the supply and demand for specific land uses in Midtown.

f. Institute housing programs which offer homeowners assistance in purchasing homes.

Additional Implementation Strategies are included in Chapter 6.

Traditional Neighborhood Design (TND) Principles

Traditional neighborhoods ...

1. Have an identifiable center and edge.
2. Are of a walkable size.
3. Include a mix of land uses and building types.
4. Have an integrated network of walkable streets.
5. Reserve special sites for civic purposes.

II. GREAT STREETS

A network of interconnected blocks and streets is present in Lynchburg. The historic urban fabric of the city allows for a series of intimate public spaces and streetscapes. Over time, however, the traditionally walkable streets have been affected by road widenings and automobile dominance. In the future these streets must be reclaimed, creating a healthy balance between vehicular and pedestrian traffic.

More than any other feature, streets define a community's character. "Great streets" are walkable, accessible to all, interesting, comfortable, safe, and memorable. While great streets accommodate vehicular and pedestrian travel, they are also *signature public spaces*. Great streets showcase high quality buildings; mixed-use streets provide good addresses for sustainable commerce while residential streets are key to livability in neighborhoods.

STRATEGIES FOR DESIGNING GREAT STREETS

1. Design for pedestrians first.

The configurations of great streets consistently provide a high-caliber experience for pedestrians as a baseline obligation, and go on from there to accommodate all other required modes of travel.

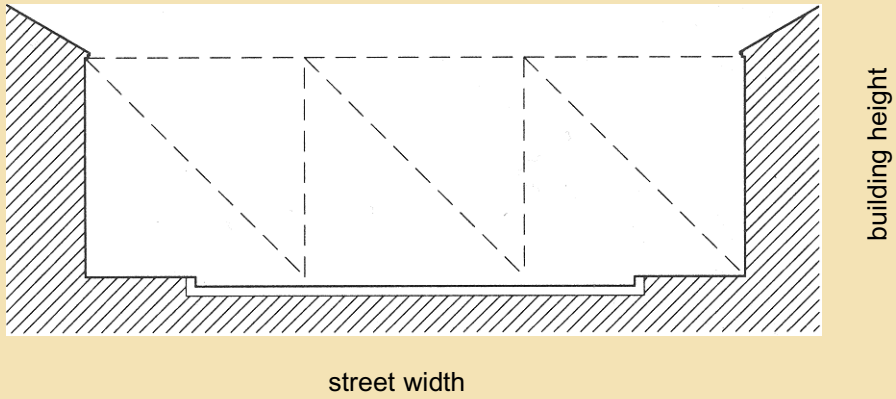
2. Scale matters.

A street should function as a three-dimensional outdoor room, surrounding its occupants in a space that is welcoming and useable, especially for pedestrians. A ratio of 1:3 for building height to street width is often cited as a minimum benchmark of success, although even more narrowly proportioned street spaces can produce a still more satisfying urban character.

Proportions of Street Space

The height-to-width ratio of the space generates spatial enclosure, which is related to the physiology of the human eye. If the width of a public space is such that the cone of vision encompasses less street wall than sky opening, the degree of spatial enclosure is slight. The ratio of 1 increment of height to 6 of width is the absolute minimum, with 1 to 3 being an effective minimum if a sense of enclosure is to result. As a general rule, the tighter the ratio, the stronger the sense of place and, often, the higher the real estate value. Spatial enclosure is particularly important for shopping streets that must compete with shopping malls, which provide very effective spatial definition. [emphasis added]. In the absence of spatial definition by facades, disciplined tree planting is an alternative. Trees aligned for spatial enclosure are necessary on thoroughfares that have substantial front yards.

Excerpted from
AIA Graphic Standards



Ratio 1:3.

Although pedestrians are invariably more comfortable on narrower streets, great streets vary in size and shape and are successful in many different configurations. Width is only part of the recipe. From an urban design point of view, there are extremely successful eight-lane roads just as there are miserable failures two lanes wide. Streets need to be sized properly for their use and matched in proportion to the architecture and/or trees that frame them. The Champs-Elysées in Paris, for example, is 230 feet wide but it is considered a "great street;" the scale of the boulevard is defined three-dimensionally. Buildings on the Champs-Elysées are 75 to 80 feet tall, creating an effective sense of enclosure. By contrast, intimate residential segments of Church Street in Charleston have a right-of-way only twenty-two feet wide—just seventeen feet curb-to-curb, plus a sidewalk—and the houses that line both sides are two stories tall. Classic streets in American streetcar suburbs, such as Rivermont Avenue, feature shallow front yards, broad planting strips for trees, and relatively narrow pavement; the trees on both sides enhance the spatial definition. The designed ratio of height to width is followed on most great streets around the world.

Champs-Elysées, Paris, France

3. Design the street as a unified whole.

An essential distinction of great streets is that the whole outdoor room is designed as an ensemble, including utilitarian auto elements (travel lanes, parking, curbs), public components (such as the trees, sidewalks, and lighting) and private elements (buildings, landscape, and garden walls). Again, Rivermont Avenue is a great example. As tempting as it may be to separate these issues, by for example leaving building placement and orientation out of the discussion when planning new thoroughfares, all the public and private elements must be coordinated to have a good effect. For example, the best city streets invariably have buildings fronting the sidewalk, usually close to the street. The random setbacks generated by conventional zoning only rarely produce this effect, so the land development regulations along a given corridor must be rethought in conjunction with any road improvement (especially widenings). In some cases, minimum height of buildings should be regulated to achieve spatial definition, almost impossible to attain with one-story buildings. Similarly, the old routine of widening roads but citing last-minute budget problems as the reason to leave street trees or sidewalks "for later" is unacceptable, comparable to building a house with no roof.

Rivermont Avenue, Lynchburg, VA

4. Include sidewalks almost everywhere.

Without sidewalks, pedestrian activity is virtually impossible. The design matters, too. The sidewalks adjacent to Randolph Macon Woman's College and Virginia Baptist Hospital are examples of properly design sidewalks. One of the simplest ways to enhance the pedestrian environment is to locate the walkway at least 5 or 6 feet away from the curb, with the street trees planted in between. Pedestrians will be more willing to utilize sidewalks if they are located a safe distance away from moving automobile traffic. The width of the sidewalk will vary according to the location. On most single-family residential streets, five feet will usually suffice, but more width is needed on rowhouse streets to accommodate stoops. On Main Streets, fourteen feet is usually most appropriate, but the sidewalk must never fall below an absolute minimum of eight feet wide.

It is not surprising that, given their multiple roles in urban life, streets require and use vast amounts of land. In the United States, from 25 to 35 percent of a city's developed land is likely to be in public right-of-way, mostly streets. If we can develop and design streets so that they are wonderful, fulfilling places to be, community building places, attractive public places for all people of cities and neighborhoods, then we will have successfully designed about 1/3 of the city directly and will have an immense impact on the rest.

- Allan Jacobs, *Great Streets*

Rivermont Avenue, Lynchburg, VA

Peakland Place, Lynchburg, VA

Lynchburg, VA

5. Shade!

Motorists, pedestrians, and cyclists all prefer shady streets. In looking at these various images throughout Lynchburg, one can understand why. Street trees should be placed between automobile traffic and pedestrians, for an added layer of psychological security for pedestrians. Street trees with fairly continuous canopies that extend over the travel lanes and the sidewalks should be the norm. This is especially vital on arterial roadways or other wide streets that contain expanses of concrete and asphalt and depend on trees for spatial definition. In areas like Downtown Lynchburg architectural encroachments over the sidewalk like awnings, arcades and colonnades, and cantilevered balconies can be used (where there may not be the opportunity to plant shade trees) to protect pedestrians from the elements and shield storefronts from glare. The taller buildings and tighter height-to-width ratio on Lynchburg's Main Street also produces some shade. In Downtown, streetlights, bus shelters, benches, and other street furniture occupy the wider sidewalks and provide the appropriate separation between pedestrians and the curb.

Charlotte, NC

6. Make medians sufficiently wide.

Where divided thoroughfares are unavoidable, the medians must be generous enough to serve as a pedestrian amenity. For street trees to thrive and for pedestrians to have adequate refuge when crossing streets, the medians need to be sized accordingly, like on Peakland Place in Lynchburg.

Beaufort, SC

7. Plant the street trees in an orderly manner.
Great streets are not the place to experiment with random, romantic, or naturalistic landscaping. Urban trees are typically planted in aligned rows, with regular spacing, using consistent species. This will not appear rigid or mechanistic, for trees do not grow identically; rather, the power of formal tree placement is that it at once shapes the space, reflects conscious design, and celebrates the intricacy and diversity within the species. More importantly, the shade produced by the trees will be continuous enough to make walking viable, and the spatial impression of aligned trees also has a traffic calming effect.

Forest Hills Gardens, NY

8. Use smart lighting.
Streets should be well lit at night both for automobile safety and pedestrian safety. Pedestrians will avoid streets where they feel unsafe. "Cobra head" light fixtures on tall poles spaced far apart do not provide for pedestrian safety. Shorter fixtures installed more frequently are more appropriate, and can provide light under the tree canopy as street trees mature. An example of good lighting can be seen in Lynchburg's Downtown and on Peakland Place.

Richmond, VA

9. Allow on-street parking in suitable locations.
On-street parking provides further separation between pedestrians and moving cars and also serves as a traffic calming device because of the "visual alertness" it triggers. Parallel parking is often better than head-in or diagonal parking because it requires less space, although diagonal parking is acceptable in exceptional cases on shopping streets if the extra curb-to-curb width is not achieved at the expense of properly sized sidewalk space. Parking near the fronts of buildings also encourages people to get out of their cars and walk, and is essential to leasing street-oriented retail space, like along Rivermont Avenue and in Wyndhurst.

10. Resist parking lots in front of buildings.
The bulk of a building's parking supply should not be up against the sidewalk or facing the street but should occur behind the building instead (or in a few cases, beside the building). The acres of surface parking between storefronts and the street are responsible for the negative visual impact of the typical commercial "strip". Such a disconnected pedestrian environment is in part due to bad habits on the part of auto-oriented chain stores, but also reflects the large setbacks and high parking requirements in conventional zoning. If the rules are changed to provide "build-to" lines rather than mandatory front setbacks for commercial buildings, it is possible to grow streets with real character, like at Wyndhurst.

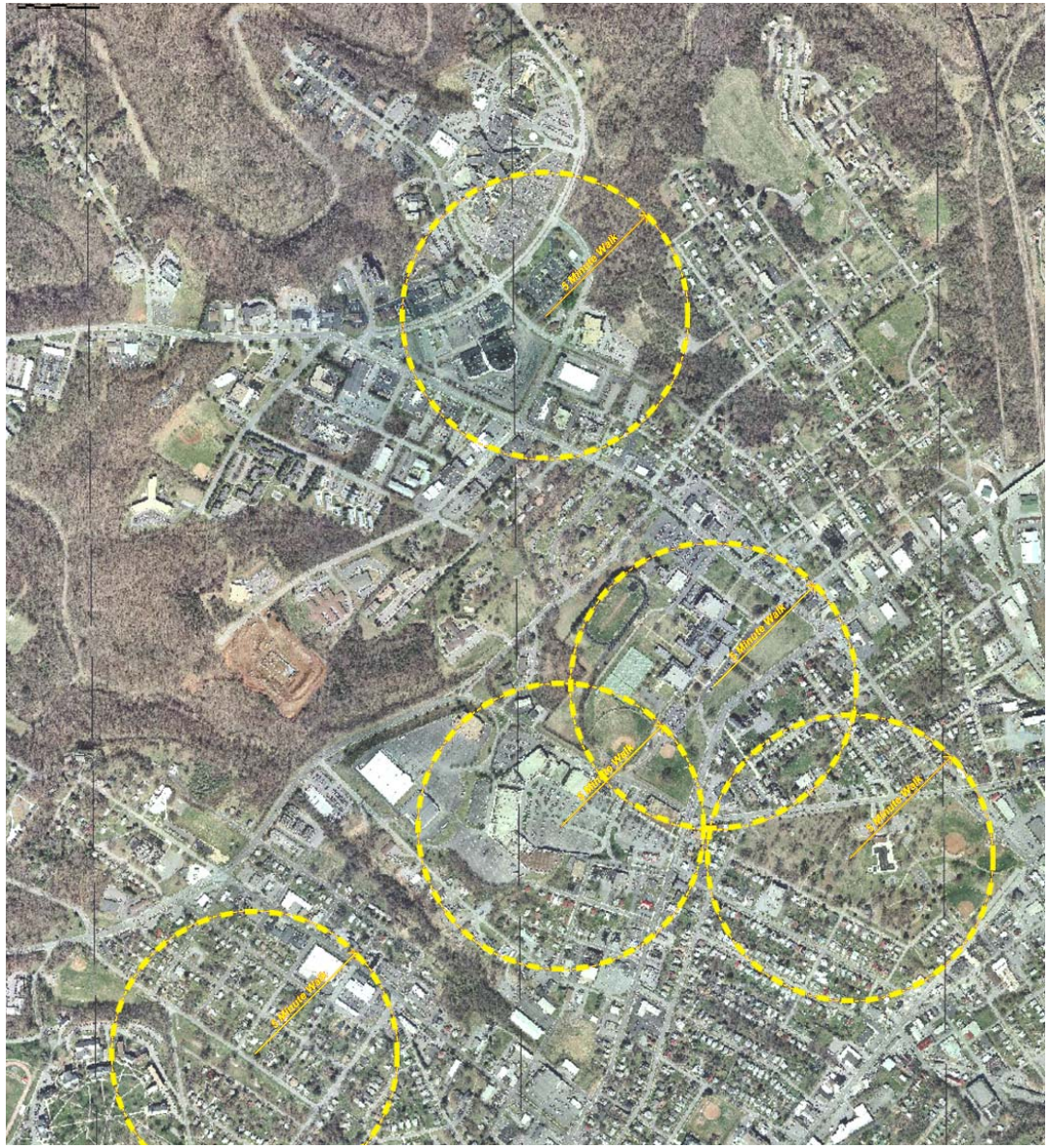
Frankfort, KY

Streets are the public living rooms in a community; the spaces between the buildings often matter more than the spaces within. Buildings located along streets sell for great addresses, street scene, and the convenience to walk places. Street oriented architecture does not turn its "back" to the street; doors, windows, balconies, and porches face the street, not blank street walls. In this way, a level of safety is reached by creating "eyes on the street." In a thriving community, street oriented architecture makes the public realm between buildings satisfying.

If streets are walkable, most people will walk a distance of approximately ¼ mile (1320 feet) before turning back or opting to drive or ride a bike rather than walk. You can see this in the way Downtown Lynchburg was designed; from 5th Street to 12th Street it is a ¼ mile walk. Most neighborhoods built before World War II are ¼ mile from center to edge. This dimension is a constant in the way people have settled for centuries. This distance relates to the manner in which people define the edges of their own neighborhoods.

Of course, neighborhoods are not necessarily circular in design, nor is that desirable. The ¼ mile radius is a benchmark for creating a neighborhood unit that is manageable in size and feel and is inherently walkable. Neighborhoods of many shapes and sizes can satisfy the ¼ mile radius test. Midtown demonstrates the ¼ mile radius principle with several distinct neighborhoods or quarters that combine to form the whole. The Illustrative Master Plan shows how to reinforce the identity and completeness of each of the Midtown's neighborhoods with infill development and preservation.

The team paid careful attention to pedestrian, vehicular, physical, and social connections within the study area. Focusing on a quarter mile walking radius, the team used base maps and on-site analysis to show that many of the destinations and community amenities of Midtown are within walking distance of one another, although missing connections and road designs that are auto-oriented inhibit walking today.



The red circles on the aerials above indicate a walking distance of a 1/4 mile.

GREAT STREETS — GETTING THERE

The following steps are necessary for the continued creation of great streets in Midtown:

a. Amend the City's Zoning Code and create a Form Based Code specific to Midtown to protect and enhance the character of Midtown's neighborhoods and to return to traditional planning principles reflective of Lynchburg planning.

b. For major street and infrastructure improvements, the City should earmark funds in the municipal budget or apply for grants from the federal government.

c. Amend the *Manual of Specifications and Standards Details* to include the the proposed street sections found in the Midtown Plan.

d. Encourage sidewalks on every street in Midtown.

e. Concentrate retail in Midtown to create a "park once" environment so that patrons can walk to many shops and stores rather than having to drive to each location.

f. Enhance Midtown streets through physical improvements, street modifications, and infill development.

Additional Implementation Strategies are included in Chapter 6.

III. PRESERVE AND CONNECT

Historic buildings, green spaces, and long views towards the mountains are key to the revitalization of Midtown. The built environment should be connected with the natural environment and destinations within Midtown enhanced.

Neighborhood preservation and restoration is an important element in maintaining Midtown's character. Many neighborhoods are threatened by demolition and road-widening projects. A balance must be reached between neighborhood preservation, new development, and the rush to move more cars. The revision of the City's land development regulations is an essential step in controlling and providing this balance. Where infill development is to occur, such development would benefit by reflecting the architectural character of the existing neighborhood.

Throughout Midtown there are a variety of old, charming, historic structures. From homes to civic buildings, these structures should be preserved. Many small projects can be readily accomplished with a historic preservation philosophy. The economic benefits and success of historic preservation is apparent from other Lynchburg neighborhoods.

From 1977 to 1999, older neighborhoods not designated as historic districts had an average **decline** in assessed value of 12%.

Neighborhoods designated as historic districts had an average **increase** in assessed value of 110%.

Source: City of Lynchburg Tax Assessments, 1977 – 1999.

Habitat for Humanity

1101 Polk Street

Lynchburg Neighborhood Development Foundation

412 Harrison Street

Lynchburg Neighborhood Development Foundation

Madison Street

In addition to the actual preservation of buildings, open spaces and views should also be protected. Whether enhancing Miller Park or adding additional green space, there should be a leveraged creation of smart green spaces. The Blackwater Creek Trail is a tremendous asset to Lynchburg and the trail should extend as green fingers throughout Midtown.

PRESERVE AND CONNECT — GETTING THERE

The following steps are necessary to preserve and connect the Midtown community:

a. Amend the City's Zoning Code and create a Form Based Code specific to Midtown to protect and enhance the character of Midtown's neighborhoods and to return to traditional planning principles reflective of Lynchburg planning.

b. Create a Midtown Business Improvement District to enable a tax collection for specific services and neighborhood improvements.

c. Where applicable, designate neighborhoods as Historic Districts and encourage residents and property owners to use Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits to rehabilitate historic structures.

d. Develop a rehabilitation / adaptive re-use strategy as a mechanism to create additional housing in Midtown.

f. Acquire green space to create a complete green network throughout Midtown.

Additional Implementation Strategies are included in Chapter 6.

START NOW, TOGETHER

Citizens and leaders of Lynchburg will need to continue to work together confidently to make the Midtown Plan a built reality. Implementation can sometimes prove to be a long and difficult endeavor so folks in Lynchburg must pull together various resources to work together. Public and private sectors, civic groups and neighborhoods, residents and business owners, and local government agencies and state government agencies should all work together to implement the plan for Midtown. The formation of public-private partnerships will send a positive message to residents as well as people and businesses looking to locate in the area.

START NOW, TOGETHER — GETTING THERE

The following steps are necessary to preserve and connect the Midtown community:

a. Form a Small Business Investment Corporation to create and retain businesses in Midtown.

b. Provide technical assistance to businesses.

c. Promote the Midtown Plan at every opportunity.

Additional Implementation Strategies are included in Chapter 6.