



Kentlands Charrette Photos



Kentlands town founder Joseph Alfandre (center) and Andrés Duany (right).



From left: Roger Lewis, Andrés Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk (seated at table).



Andrés Duany (left) sits across the table from Alex Krieger and the mall developer.

Project Name: Kentlands

Location: Gaithersburg, Md.

Classification: TND

Designer: Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company

Consultants: Joseph Alfandre & Co.

Developer: Great Seneca Development Corp. (Chevy Chase Savings Bank)

Design Date: 1987

Construction Begun: June 1990

Status: Completed

Site: 352 acres (Net Site: 236 acres)

Project Construction Cost: \$67M

Residential: 2,051 units

Houses: 477

Rowhouses: 378

Multi-Family Condominiums: 560

Apartments: 590

Live/Work Units: 46

Residential Price Range:

\$127K – 500K (1994)

Current Range: \$150K – \$1.5M

Commercial:

2M square feet planned

Office: 30K

Retail: 450K

Live-Work: 72K

Public & Civic Program: Common greens, five tot lots, recreation center (clubhouse, pools, tennis, basketball), three lakes (with fishing piers and walking paths), elementary school, daycare center, one church, meeting hall. City ownership: Little Quarry Park, Village Green, Kentlands Mansion, Gaithersburg Arts Barn and Firehouse.

KENTLANDS (1987)



Andrés Duany presenting.

Photo: Rick Hall

Duany Plater-Zyberk & Co.

Since its founding in 1980, DPZ has designed over 200 new towns and revitalization projects for existing communities. The firm's early project of the town of Seaside, Fla., is the first traditional town to be built in the United States since World War II. Led by principal's Andrés Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, the firm's method of integrating design with accompanying design codes and regulations is currently being applied in towns and cities in areas ranging from 14 to 10,000 acres throughout the United States and Canada.

A significant aspect of DPZ's work is its innovative use of planning regulations, including the Urban and Architectural Codes that accompany each design. The codes not only address the manner in which buildings are formed and placed to create well-designed public spaces, they also codify the local architectural traditions and building techniques. DPZ's work is primarily carried out by the charrette process, which elicits a positive response from the community and regulating agencies while reducing the project design time.

DPZ also maintains an architectural practice. The practice explores the relationship of the individual building to its urban context and its participation in the specific local, geographical and historical tradition.



Good

- That the specific location on the highway network permitted the development of a very extensive commercial program. This program, within walking distance, allows Kentlands to be self-sufficient for most people's ordinary daily needs. The commercial complement of Kentlands includes most of the most useful big box retailers designed in such a way that they are pedestrian accessible. There is also entertainment commercial on the square, including an eight-plex cinema. There are also a good number (46) of live-work units along the main street.

- That housing is provided in great variety. There are single-family houses of all sizes, townhouses, condominium and rental apartments, as well as assisted living apartments. These are, to a great extent, located in close proximity to each other.

- That these buildings were developed by a great variety of builders, with relatively harmonious results.

- That the community association documents were so designed that the citizens were empowered to become the guardians of the master plan despite a relatively unsympathetic master developer.

- That there is an elementary school and there will be a middle school within the pedestrian shed.

- That most of the thoroughfares were built to be fully pedestrian oriented.

- That the stream and wetlands were reconfigured for beauty and human use and provided with crossings decades prior to the environmental legislation that would have prevented it.

Bad

- That within the Kentlands site there is a deficiency in conventional office workplace due to the radical overbuilding that was in place at the time of Kentlands' design (1988) and most of the subsequent years of development. There is, however a gradual adjustment taking place, with some restaurant sites now becoming office and with a majority of the many live/work units tending toward office on either two or three floors.

- That the designs of some of the more important thoroughfares were not permitted to be pedestrian oriented. One has been retrofitted to traffic calming, but some important ones remain unpleasant to cross and to walk along.

- That the association documents allowed micromanagement of the architecture by the city to the extent of initially frustrating some of the better builders.

- That the "vertical" civil engineering killed trees and disrupted topography that could have been saved by the plan. It is only now, after all is done, that we know how to do it "the old way."

- That the architecture of the town center and the town square are visually hyperactive and illiterate in the language of American commercial architecture.

- That the highway planning at the periphery of the site prevents sufficient connectivity to adjacent sites.

- The gradual loss of the affordable housing through market forces. Although a wide range of prices has been retained, the bottom end has been lost.

Critique by Andrés Duany

Vision Keeper

Mike Watkins
Kentlands Town Architect

Victor Dover's final criticism of Kentlands is still ringing in my ears. "What about that view down the street past your office and across the dam that terminates in the backs of two houses? How did that happen?" It is the most difficult type of criticism of Kentlands for me to hear. First, because it is a valid criticism. And second, because the oversight is my fault — a reason certain to receive less attention than the first in my thoughts which follow. I know exactly the view he is talking about. The reasons certainly involve the Army Corps of Engineers but mostly my own inexperience in the early days of Kentlands.

The circumstances are not my reason for mentioning this criticism. What stands out to me about this criticism is that it is valid. Frequently when Kentlands is critiqued, I find much of the criticism to be born of ignorance or simply an attempt to gain attention by criticizing something many are excited about. Surprisingly, at the same time, a number of much more significant and legitimate criticisms go unmentioned.

Few criticisms of Kentlands really bother me because I see and experience every day just how well the place works. I "walked-on" at the Kentlands charrette in June 1988 and by the end of the year opened the Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company office on site, even before Mrs. Kent moved out in 1989. In the 13 years since, I have developed more than a few of my own criticisms. Grateful for this opportunity to share a few of my thoughts and at the risk of appearing defensive ...

The "Island of Kentlands"

One ridiculous criticism is that Kentlands is an island isolated from its surroundings. Kentlands is surrounded by a sea of suburban sprawl to be sure. Despite isolation being one the primary objectives of sprawl, the Kentlands site plan proposed connecting with adjacent properties at every opportunity. The adjacent townhouse complex would have none of it. Then. Once the first phase was completed, however, these same neighbors insisted that the city require the developer to install pedes-

trian connections to their neighborhood, which we did gladly.

The decision was made not to front buildings on the collector roads at the perimeter of the site but to build a landscaped berm instead. This was done for the (we

thought) obvious reason that no one would want to live on a 4-lane collector road with high-speed geometrics (a 12-lane Parisian boulevard, yes, but not this suburban collector). Connections were made across the collector to integrate Kentlands with other developments.

When the adjacent 343-acre National Geographic Society property was rezoned for a mixed-use TND eight years after Kentlands, there was not one objection from any of the then over 900 families living in Kentlands to seamlessly integrate this new neighborhood with theirs. The property line that formerly existed is now virtually indistinguishable. Not very island-like. Kentlands also has bus service that connects it to the world beyond, and Kentlands Boulevard was designed to accommodate a future light rail line.

Socially and politically, Kentlands has become very integrated into its larger context, the city of Gaithersburg. Kentlands residents serve actively on many volunteer city committees as well as on the planning commission and the City Council. The city takes full advantage of the amenities that Kentlands offers to all of its residents — Gaithersburg's Oktoberfest brings thousands to Kentlands, a conference facility operates in the Kent mansion, and the city's art center will occupy the former barn.

The criticism that Kentlands is a nice place but built in isolation is more a criticism of the intentionally isolationist surroundings than of Kentlands.

"Details So Bad They Make Your Teeth Hurt"

This memorable criticism of Kentlands' architecture was penned by Eve Kahn writing for the *Wall Street Journal*. She is right. It is also true of most architecture

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Peer
Review

Kentlands: Successful Despite Obstacles

By Mike Lykoudis

As a first generation TND, the successes of Kentlands as a pioneering development have been noteworthy. It has served a role as the poster child of new urbanism's real-life, year-round communities and its considerable influence on HUD Secretary Henri Cisneros as a model for good future housing and community development. It has been a model for many communities struggling with their own future in the face of sprawl and has played a tremendous pedagogical role in the education of architects, planners, public officials, developers and students. In addition, it was the only community in its area that actually sold units through the recession of the 1980s.

Kentlands serves as a real town center for a wider area than its own borders

with a quality of life for its denizens that allows children to play and adults to have pedestrian access to the public and commercial areas. The street network allows connectivity to the surrounding areas to provide those residents with access as well. In keeping with the principles of good community design, the residents of Kentlands can find their daily needs in the retail shops as well as big box retail in the shopping center. The live/work units provide additional amenities to both the residents and business owners of the town. The architecture, through its structural elements such as walls, opening and roofs, alludes to an architecture of permanence that is so important for a community to project itself into the future. Furthermore, a hierarchy of structural elements from the classi-

cal to the vernacular differentiates the public and private realms.

Kentlands offers continuing lessons about town making and building at the urban, architectural and structural typological levels. Its imperfections across the typological spectrum were the focus of the session's discussions. Because Kentlands was situated on a topography that presented a discontinuous buildable area, it was difficult to come up with a conceptual plan. The structure of the street plan seems unclear. The commercial and public functions and other significant uses and activities do not occur along the major streets nor are they easily found through the street network. Someone mentioned the fact that in a good plan it is easy to find the important buildings when you enter the city. In Kentlands this seems more difficult than it should be.

Other imperfections include the presence of the backs of houses to streets. (In later discussions this, in fact, may be one of those things that in isolation and if done well helps give a place character.) Another issue is the actual construction and quality of the architecture. As mentioned earlier, communities need to project themselves into the future to remain vital and to renew themselves. The relative permanence of the buildings is crucial to this aspect of town making. In Kentlands, the walls, openings and roofs seem to fo-



cus on arriving at an image of traditional architecture rather than using durable construction principles that will provide longevity to the fabric and public buildings.

While some may dub Kentlands an unlucky project, it certainly has been quite successful despite the obstacles that it had to overcome both as a pioneering endeavor and its own particularities as a project. There are lessons to be learned in Kentlands at all scales of urbanism and architecture. In particular, the importance of the clarity of the public space network, the relation of that network to the public buildings and fabric, and finally to the urbanism of its architecture including the principled use of regional materials and methods to achieve a real permanence, as well as its symbolic representation, of the architecture.

Peer
Review

Kentlands: Getting Real

By Maricé Chael

Andrés Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk (Lizz) were and are my teachers. Kentlands is the town they conceived in Gaithersburg, Md. At the time it was designed — in June 1988 — the new urbanism did not have much to show for itself. Seaside had just begun to surface on the radar screen; Calthorpe was just signing his contract for Laguna West. Back then, said Andrés, "We knew nothing. Then something of a greater complexity hit us."

Kentlands is surrounded by sprawl. It abuts arterial roads, housing subdivisions, a shopping center and an office park. It is not clear from its periphery that Kentlands is the antithesis to sprawl.

Just listen to its residents. One after another, they testify that Kentlands has transformed their lives. "We live in a corner rowhouse, which is perfect for us," says Cathy Janus. "We used to live in a big

house, too big for just three people. We spent all week watering the lawn, until we figured that our live-to-work ratio was too large." In Cathy's case, as well as others, the first visit to Kentlands was a revelation.

Cindy van den Beemt, her husband, and her 8-year-old daughter, Elkie, lived in two prior houses in Montgomery County, Md. One was on a cul-de-sac. The second house was in a more rural setting on two acres of land, which felt to Cindy "like Death Valley." She says, "We stumbled upon Kentlands, and we knew that it was the answer for us. I walk 75 percent more to places where I used to drive. Since most of us lived in isolated suburbia, we used our cars for everything. But we all need to unlearn those things. I've rediscovered the joys of being able to walk."

Kentlands, named after one Otis Beall Kent who purchased the property in

the 1950s, is the brainchild of developer Joe Alfandre. Designed during a much-publicized charrette, it includes 352 acres planned as neighborhoods of mixed densities and housing types, and a commercial district. The charrette perspectives,



drawn by the late Charles Barrett, recall the imagery of towns like Annapolis, Md.

Duany tells the Kentlands story like a Greek tragedy. "Kentlands is, in retrospect, an unlucky project. We inherited a lot of things, like environmental discontinuity, that make it difficult to come up with anything remotely like a conceptually pure plan — the beginning of the bad luck. In the charrette, we discovered one beautiful oak. We designed a beautiful square around it. On the second night of the charrette, under an amazing blue moon, lightning hit that oak and killed it."

Mike Watkins has been the town architect in Kentlands for the past 13 years and is a resident of Kentlands. He reminisces about how he became involved with

the project: "I've always admired the work of Andrés and Lizz. What attracted me to their architecture was how well-reasoned it was." At the time a recent graduate of the University of Cincinnati, he persisted in becoming involved in the Kentlands charrette. Eventually, Duany suggested that he simply show up. Said Watkins, "I didn't know exactly what I was getting into. I was put to work with Douglas [Duany] drawing landscaping details. Later, I worked with Lizz and Bill Dennis on the design of the neighborhoods."

There are six neighborhoods. Among them are the Old Farm Neighborhood, which contains a 19th century residence and



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Chael/Kentlands
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barn as its focus, bordered by lakes of reconfigured wetlands from the '50s; and the Gatehouse District, which contains the elementary school and a church flanking among the buildings — its circus. At the edge of one neighborhood is a retail center, originally slated by the developer as a regional mall. It was to have been connected to the town by a main square fronted by main street buildings, which would have acted as the mall food court.

Of course, the real tragedy was that Joe Alfandre's company — through external circumstances beyond his control — went bankrupt. Due to the recession, the bank assumed control of the project. Subsequently, the original scheme for the commercial area switched from a regional shopping mall to a regional shopping center that includes K-Mart, Lowe's and Giant Foods, plus the usual complimentary row of stores. It is linked to the town by a main street of live-work units and a neighborhood town center, including storefront commercial.

By new urbanist standards, Kentlands' retail is compromised. Duany states, "The neighbors originally perceived the change to be a lower grade of retail. However, the uses were tailored to meet one's daily needs in the way that a mall would not. Therefore, one could actually live in Kentlands without owning a car from its inception. You can get everything you need from nails to steak."

Mike Watkins recalls being in the local post office and being drawn into a conversation by an elderly lady in a wheelchair. "I asked her if she lived in the senior apartments across the road. She said she did. She said, 'Kentlands is perfect for me. I can live here and do all my errands on my own; even though my doctor told me I couldn't drive anymore. I moved here from a retirement community.' That woman's quality of life is clearly improved because she lives in a town." Watkins told me this story via cell phone, walking about Kentlands. While we talked he bought a latte, did his banking, saw his travel agent and walked to his own live/work home conveniently located next to the DPZ office.

Kentlands' architecture attempts to balance the builders' need for prefabrication and the desire for quality construction. Most of the architectural details of the buildings are prefabricated, although the building materials are authentic. Duany, however, observes, "Wood rots if you don't detail it properly. We have actually destined the owners to terrific maintenance budgets because wood is not what it used to be — it's genetically modified pulp — and it starts rotting the minute you nail it in."

He also maintains that the builders' architects had bedeviled Kentlands' architecture by mere incompetence. According to Watkins, who with his staff oversees design review for all the projects proposed for Kentlands, "In the beginning, we were able to get only the necessities for decent urbanism approved and got zero in terms of architecture success. As things started to build out, builders said: 'Now we're ready to listen.' And later, some of them even asked for our advice and started going to better architects. They went to great urban places and took pictures. The smaller builders who worked with the smaller architectural firms did the better projects, in my opinion."

Notwithstanding the frequent impatience of Kentlands' planners with the architects and builders, the architecture of Kentlands is unmistakably about town making. Observing any typical street, the dooryards are shallow; the building walls give the street definition. The color of the brick and the architectural detailing vary from building to building. Streets with travel lanes built to satisfy fire regulations have been retrofitted back to size as yield-

movement streets with on-street parking. The service alleys shield the garage doors and trash receptacles from the more formal, tree-lined streets.

Duany said, "Probably the single greatest service of Kentlands to the new urbanism was that [then HUD Secretary] Henry Cisneros originated HOPE VI from an initial visit to Kentlands. Cisneros said, 'I love this stuff.' After some initial meetings, he actually said, 'Can you set up a training session?' Within two weeks he had 27 people at Harvard. Within two months he had 270 people at Harvard, and the new HOPE VI standards were written very quickly.

"Another thing new urbanists should pursue is a form of governance." Duany explains, "Joe in his very idealistic early period met a man, David Wolfe, who had written for Homeowners' Associations (HOAs) and had a theory that they should work like real governments, and that the people should be empowered — not just the developer. This doesn't always work as it should, but it worked in Kentlands. If you ever see the first page of the HOA document for Kentlands, it looks like the American Constitution. 'We the people.' Beautiful language. It empowered the citizens very early on and very powerfully. What happened in Kentlands is, when the bank came in and tried to sweep the plan away, the citizens didn't permit it. The citizens actually saved Kentlands. That was one of these almost miraculous circumstances. None of our other communities have had that document."

The residents of Kentlands also started their own newspaper publication. Diane Dorney, the editor, recalls, "I got involved in writing for the *Kentlands Town Crier* seven years ago. It has been a useful tool for getting things done in the town." Dorney's newspaper business has grown to include a number of other publications focusing on the new urbanism including *The Town Paper*, which is mailed bimonthly to a national audience.

As an activist, she recalls her involvement with the adjacent DPZ project, Lakelands. "I participated in the Lakelands charrette a couple of years after moving to Kentlands and realized that there were big problems with public misunderstanding of the design of traditional neighborhoods. This misunderstanding threatened to hold up approvals and compromise the plan for Lakelands. It became clear to me that there was a need to build support and consensus from the bottom up."

She says that public officials hear the comments of those persons who show up at the public meetings — loudly and clearly. The people who show up are usually the ones with negative things to say about the plan. Public officials tend to give that negative testimony a lot of weight. "I figured out it was up to people like us, residents who understand the benefits of this type of development, to give positive testimony in order to see it happen next door in Lakelands."

Another outcome from the Kentlands charrette process was the Kentlands Community Foundation. Cindy van den Beemt is its director. She said, "There are two separate entities that oversee our affairs. One is the Kentlands Citizens' Assembly (KCA), which has a Board. It governs the day-to-day activities like approving plans, renovations, landscaping and painting. And there is the Kentlands Community Foundation, which is a non-profit foundation originating in the Kentlands Charter." Conceived by Joseph Alfandre, he believed that such an organization might be a great tool to promote art and culture. Initially funded by the KCA, Foundation events include smaller community events and far-reaching events such as the annual Kentlands 5K Run, which

draws thousands of people. Its intention is to be a force locally and nationally.

"We recently hired a student intern, Daniel Creel, from the University of Maryland. His projects include researching the evolution of Kentlands and its implementation from a critical perspective. He is also examining and collecting material on archives of the original Kent Farm. This exhibit will serve as the basis for a town study, archive center and docent program. This will be located in the Carriage House, which will soon house the offices of the Foundation," said van den Beemt.

"The city of Gaithersburg has begun renovations of Kent barn to create a performing arts center," van den Beemt continued. "Scheduled for completion by late winter of 2001, the second floor will have a 99-seat theater, and the ground floor is to be outfitted for artist studios and galleries. The Kentlands Mansion, also renovated by the city, currently hosts special events, such as string quartet performances, which are open to all citizens of Gaithersburg."

Watkins recalls, "Today I was walking the neighborhood with Joe Alfandre, and we got a chance to reminisce a bit. Joe said, 'Andrés was really the general and you have been the man in the trenches. After I left the project, you became the vision keeper.' We spoke about the charrette plan: 'It's been intensified and massaged, but it is very much the same, isn't it?' In detail, it has really improved."

Duany reflects, "The best thing you can say about Kentlands is that it looks, and — more importantly — works, like 'a real place.' You get a high level of imperfection, but at the same time, you also get a high level of reality. It's easier to breathe there. After 10 more years of dust and grime and rot, people will think that it's 100 years old."



Massengale/Overview From page 4

The criteria for the judgments were simple: 1) design and proportion, 2) construction and detail, and 3) materials and finishes.

There are some obvious comparisons with the Modernist principles of architecture and urbanism, which swept away traditional design. Even though they invented “the science of Ergonomics,” many of the Modernist designers who made furniture only paid lip service to the functional paradigms for the comfort of people sitting in their chairs.

The proof is in the pudding: In the name of functionalism, superstar architects and designers like Mies van der Rohe and Charles Eames designed some of the most uncomfortable chairs in the history of the world. They were less interested in comfort than the expression of modern materials and industrial processes.

Van der Rohe wanted to perfect the assembly process of chairs made with curved chromium tubing. Eames was fascinated by the manufacturing process for bending a piece of plywood. Both wanted to tackle problems like speeding up the mass assembly line, or how to make chairs that would stack efficiently for storage. Each wanted to create an unprecedented form that expressed their industrial age and individual creativity. That produced a very different result than the traditional values of Good, Better, Best, which judged objects not on the basis of their originality, but on the execution and elaboration of ideas and forms that had been proven to work.

Enough looking at different examples of 18-century chairs trains the eye to see the differences and appreciate the distinctions that distinguish one from another: One sees immediately that while one Chippendale chair might have a pair of front legs with beautiful curves, another chair has legs that by comparison are only good. Similarly, one chair might have a beautifully carved top rail, but another might have even better carving. Put that all together, and you have a list of objective criteria for judging furniture.

The same principles apply to architecture and urbanism. Traditional buildings and streets are judged not on their originality, but on the quality of their design and their execution of enduring principles distilled over time. Twentieth century architecture and urbanism rejected timeless principles of design for principles judged to be of the time. This was often done by turning traditional principles on their head, to create what Machado and Silveti call “unprecedented reality.”

The search for novelty made the criteria for judging architecture and urbanism subjective, while the standards for

judging traditional architecture and urbanism are comparative and objective. For example, within the various forms of classicism — Romantic Classicism, Palladianism, etc. — we can say which in each category are Good, Better or Best.

This has many useful benefits. One is that you can teach the principles for making a good traditional building or street to anyone, so that the student does not have to be especially talented to reach the level of Good. With the looser standards of Modernism, only the most talented and inventive reach the level of Good. The exception is in a Modernism based on well-defined principles, as is taught at Cornell. But in this age of Eisenman and Koolhaas, that is rare.

Another benefit is that when dealing with the contemporary building culture, we can have different standards for different clients. Pulte Houses gets the *parti* and materials that a budget for the Good level can support, while the high-minded developer of the Windsor, an expensive Duany Plater-Zyberk designed TND-like resort in Florida, gets a code for the Best. Pulte might be allowed to use the Windsor line (no relation) of wood substitute windows, while Windsor can be held to the highest window standards, with only wood (unclad) allowed.

A large obstacle to improving the buildings in new urban developments has been the cost of quality materials and supplies. Most of the projects can't afford the best supplies, and there is an enormous drop in quality from the best to practically everything else.

When dealing with window manufacturing companies, we can have one set of standards for the economy budget (Good), another for a better budget, and third for the highest budget (Best). If we can pull some of the largest manufacturers and builders up to the level of the Good, we will have accomplished a lot. Trying to raise the level of design and construction of the pseudo-traditional materials and supplies prevalent in the building industry today is one of the primary missions of the Institute for Traditional Architecture.

Implicit in Good, Better, Best is also a way to resolve Rob Steuterville's problem: If we create a scale with Good assigned 1 to 10, Better 11 to 20, and Best 21 to 30, we can grade the 27 piazza on the same scale as the 9 TOD town center without disparaging the town center.

There are also less obvious implications. Comparing Seaside to Celebration illustrates one of them. At Seaside, Duany Plater-Zyberk and Robert Davis proposed a regional, construction-based vernacular, while Robert A.M. Stern Architects, Coo-

per-Robertson & Partners and Urban Design Associates planned Celebration to be built with a stylebook. Thus Seaside has blocks with consistent building types such as Charleston houses facing each other across the streets, while Celebration intentionally makes every block and facing block have a mix of styles that are primarily confined to the massing and the front façade.

This is partly, I think, because my old boss Bob Stern likes playing with style, designing one house with five elevations, for example. And perhaps partly because so much of Urban Design Associates' work has been with inner-city clients who cannot afford traditional construction: Their traditional component is mainly in their urbanism and their facades.

But more importantly, Seaside was built by private owners and small contractors, while Celebration was built by national “homebuilders.” There was plenty of money to be made at Celebration, but most of the builders did not want to spend too much time thinking about their Product: a generic name that accurately reflects the amount of design time spent on the individual buildings.

Achieving the streetscapes that were built at Celebration was an important achievement. It was enough to say that inside the houses the homebuilders would build a product their buyers would want.

Celebration raised the standard for large-scale development in Florida, where there are only a few new projects that can be called Good. But if you drive from Celebration to Miami, for every 100 places you see along the way — new or old — Celebration is better than 99 of them. That's something to be proud of.

This is probably the first time since CNU I in Alexandria that we will spend so much time talking about design. Everyone who was there knows that was a very special event: You looked around the room and thought how lucky you were to be at the start of something like the CNU. We talked a lot about design, but the unspoken sentiment below the surface was how we would use design to change the world.

I also remember CNU IV, here in Charleston. Mark Schimmenti said, “This is the best. All this great discussion and then you step outside and you're in Charleston.” I think we'll have just as good a time this weekend. On with the show. Thank you for coming.

Note: This essay was compiled from the author's opening remarks at the first Council meeting.

Watkins/Kentlands From page 9

built these days, so not a particularly insightful criticism. However, through The Kentlands Code prepared during the charrette, efforts were made to improve the quality of the trim. I've probably given away as many copies of *The America Vignolia* as have ever been sold. In the case of one particularly embarrassing trim detail and even before Kahn's visit, I gave up working with the architect and the builder and tracked down the subcontractor in the field. We met at his pickup. I showed him several examples from various books of how the detail was properly done. He apologized and immediately began retrofitting the homes that were not yet occupied. We agreed not to tell the builder or the architect.

The ambitious vision of Joe Alfandre, the original developer of Kentlands, Andrés Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk included many issues considered to be of greater importance than the trim details. In negotiations with the suburban production builders of Kentlands, some battles were lost while we focused on winning the war. Kahn is right about the architecture. We simply cared about other things more.

“Where's the Corner Store?”

Among the objectives that mattered most but is completely absent from the critical discussion — and from the neighborhood — is the corner store. One of the greatest benefits of the traditional neighborhood is the ability to walk to a store or similar “third place.” The Gatehouse District, the first neighborhood in Kentlands, has at its center an elementary school, a church, a childcare center and a site for a corner store. But no store. The site was sold at a very reasonable price to someone who proposed doing exactly the kind of store we had always imagined, and plans were enthusiastically approved by the city. Regrettably, the sale included no requirement that the store be built within a certain time frame. The owner of the lot has since moved to another state, listed the property for sale, and is now asking more than twice what was originally paid for the lot. The provision of such an amenity is far too important to be handled so carelessly. Providing this, or a similar type of essential neighborhood use, is something that this movement should tackle collectively.

Open Space

The neighborhood would have benefited from a more careful and deliberate approach to the programming and provision of the “open space,” which is not at

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Massengale/I'On From previous page

tween the houses and the water have been removed over the years.

Victor, Joe and Vince all like picturesque plans. Vince once said to me that “none of the best streets in Charleston” are straight. In fact, if one looks at a map of historic Charleston, one will find that most of the streets are straight as an arrow. There are notable exceptions, as on Church Street, where the street curves around its eponymous church, or where Church brilliantly meets Water Street. But the differing perceptions of Charleston have as much to do with individual preferences as reality.

Most new urbanist designers fall into one of four camps, which relate to historic models from a century ago. There are the classicists and City Beautiful types, more medieval designers with plans like Camillo Sitte's, planners with curving streets a la John Nolen and other American planners

of the 1900s and teens, and the “Unwinites” who combine different tendencies in one. Most of us fall in the last camp, but some are at the more medieval end of that scale, and others at the more classical end. Joe, Victor and Vince are probably the former, while my personal preference is the latter.

Thus I'On has the intersection of Ponsbury and Sowell as it is today. At this stage in the construction of I'On, one can still see that Ponsbury aligns perfectly to the north and south of Sowell. But where they come together, they have been shifted to hide the alignment. Sitte would agree with the shift. I want the connection, so that one can sense the connection from Mathis Ferry Road to the Creek Club.

Although I don't know all the considerations that went into the phasing, I would like to have seen Perseverance built before Ponsbury because it is more of an organizing spine in the image of the development. We will see if it's developed

in a way that one will mentally connect it from beginning to end. The boulevard section in the middle is unusual because it is not strongly connected to the neighborhood center and the entrance from Mathis Ferry Road. Hierarchically, we usually expect boulevards to be entrances, or at least expansions of major through streets.

Many of the straight streets of Charleston have a power that comes from their axial arrangement. Church Street would lose its interest if the view to the church weren't straight, contrasting with the curve. And the way in which Market Street terminates at the temple-like public building above the covered market and then splits to go around the market is one of the most effective bits of urbanism in the city.

On the whole, the beauty of the streets of Charleston comes from the architecture and the regular rhythm of the trees rather than the brilliant arrangement of the streets. Interestingly, they don't

photograph well — the curving streets are much more photogenic, although they are only different, not better, experientially.

An insightful perception that Douglas Duany pointed out is that even the streets in Charleston that are not straight rarely curve. When there is a bend in the street, it is more often made by the intersection of two straight pieces than a smooth curve.

In the early days of new urbanism, designers were afraid to make curving streets, because of their suburban associations. But the truth is that straight streets require either good architecture or mature trees, or they are very disappointing. In a new urbanist development with spec-built houses and young trees, curving streets are safer.

By the time of the I'On charrette, a Miami style of new urbanism that wavered between the sensibilities of Nolen and

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all the same thing as simply more open space. The residents are making great use of the space provided, but sometimes must do so in spite of the characteristics of the space — the lawn in front of the clubhouse that is used for outdoor concerts but slopes from side-to-side comes to mind. With good intentions, residents are going about furnishing and planting the open space but with no master plan in mind and no list of native or appropriate plant materials. Although there have been some efforts to reinforce the environmental quality of existing wetlands and lakes, there is considerably more potential here than has been realized or even proposed. A master plan for the open space that includes responding to the needs of the community and the enhancement of the natural environment should be undertaken.

Principles or Politics

Early on, principle and politics were tightly interwoven. On the last night of the charrette, the vision initiated by Alandre, Duany and Plater-Zyberk was shared with Gaithersburg's Mayor Ed Bohrer, the City Council, the planning commission and the general public. The mayor understood that this vision was established on a foundation of principles. He set out with great determination to do everything he could to see that these principles were executed with as little compromise as possible. They became the criteria for evaluating the project as it moved through the approval process. When Alandre handed the project back to the lender in 1991, the expectation was that they, too, would follow these principles. In recent years the relationship between principles and politics has weakened. When Ed Bohrer passed away a few years ago, Kentlands — and Gaithersburg — lost one of its strongest visionaries and advocates for sound principles.

A great example is a certain "tree save lot," the source of considerable emotional debate at present. Several years ago, while attempting to receive approval for subsequent phases and under pressure from a few residents, lots previously approved for houses were identified as "tree save lots." The developer was required to set these lots aside, never mind that they sloped severely and would serve no useful purpose. Never mind that the physical design of the street was eroded. More open space was provided. Several years ago, the large tree on one of these lots died and was hauled away. Recently the developer sold this overgrown, vacant lot to a builder who submitted a plan to the city to build a house on that lot. Politics, not principles, have ruled the raging debate thus far. The tree is mulch now, and we still can't build a house on this lot originally intended for one. Despite the understanding and support of the principles of the new urbanism by most residents and city officials, the noisy few attempt to persuade the community and city leaders to ignore the principles and listen to them.

"Kentlands Is Made of Real Brick, Real Wood ..."

To avoid the visual blight of aging faux materials, The Kentlands Code permitted only authentic materials, with few exceptions. The problem that became quite evident after just a few years is that even the "real" wood available today does not "age with dignity." Several houses have already been completely "reclad" because the original simulated material failed. I am in the process of preparing recommendations to the Kentlands Citizens Assembly for additional simulated materials, not available when the code was first written, to replace some of those "real" materials.

Dinner and a Movie, Walking Distance From Home

Even places that are not as beautiful as they might have been still manage to work as intended. Market Square is a good example of this. While the buildings are cheap and rudimentary, the space they shape is decent and the uses they house encourage people to gather there. "Chance meetings" of neighbors occur constantly to the point that it no longer serves as a valuable escape from a hectic office to concentrate on writing an article (I have to go to a coffee shop in a strip center for that). Market Square offers a wide variety of food venues — a coffee shop, a wine bar, a diner, a sushi bar, etc. — and as a result attracts a very diverse group of people. The range of activities available to those without a car attracts students in droves. Just hanging out in the square is a great source of entertainment (both good and bad) for them and, consequently, for the rest of us. Even the bad behavior should be considered a success for Kentlands. Not because of the problem itself, but because the problem is forcing people to interact with one another to address it. Clearly the careful placement of a bench isn't going to whip an immature teenager into shape, but the pressure of the community to behave as a part of the community can begin to address such attitudes of disregard.

Gaithersburg: Maryland's Smart Growth Laboratory

While written off by some as an isolated, greenfield project, Kentlands laid the groundwork for a different future in the city of Gaithersburg. This 13-year-old town has influenced the planning process, policies and principles throughout the city and the surrounding area. With the demonstrated success of Kentlands, the city has pursued new street design standards, zoning ordinances; bikeway standards and other policies, all based on traditional neighborhood design principles. Furthermore, the city hired DPZ to do a downtown revitalization plan in 1995. Other efforts include the redesign of the city's major commercial strip, the design of several new neighborhoods and a mixed-use center, and the retrofitting of existing neighborhoods. As other well-designed neighborhoods are built and existing ones are enhanced, Gaithersburg is becoming a city that offers many great choices for nice places to live and work and shop. Gaithersburg even bills itself as "Maryland's Smart Growth Laboratory." As a result, and despite the flaws, Kentlands and Gaithersburg serve as models for the greater Washington area and across the country.

When it came to choosing battles in the compromise gauntlet of building Kentlands, I chose those I thought would make the place the strongest community possible. I also chose to fight those battles that had to be won "now," foregoing others that could be revisited later. I sought to protect the value of the neighborhood, the greatest determinant of property values. There is still room for improvement, and I am optimistic that as Kentlands matures it will get better. It will just take more of what it has always taken — time and determination.

When critiquing Kentlands, prominent views of backs of buildings should be noted to keep folks like me humble. I live and work on the street Victor Dover mentioned, and I am faced with this view several times every day. While I regret that others who live here must suffer such mistakes too, this one serves as a constant reminder to me of the daily and lasting impact this profession has on the lives of those who live in these places we design.

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Unwin was evolving; I'On is more like Unwin. I worry about the Nolen plans, which are often very pretty in plan but not memorable in person.

The architecture and streets at I'On steadily get better, but the landscaping is the Achilles Heel of the project. Most of the landscaping is modern suburban style, with meandering clumps of plants rarely found in the natural local landscape. The worst part is the first lake, where all the "groupings" are supposed to be "natural," but none are. Perhaps it is the vista across the lake that lets us see just how flaccid the design is.

The designers should have studied the lake and gardens at Middleton Plantation, just outside Charleston. Middleton has a great garden by the English classicist John Bridgeman. Most of Bridgeman's gardens were torn out by the Romantic classicist Capability Brown or his followers, so Middleton is historically rare as well as beautiful.

Bridgeman knew how to use the local plants of the South Carolina Lowcountry. At Middleton he created the perfect antidote to the suburban garden, but not enough professionals study its lessons.

The I'On charrette was one of the early charrettes, where new urbanists were feeling their way along. Design techniques were more highly developed than in the very beginning, but there was still an adventurous aspect that has been lost to professionalism in most charrettes. Peter Katz came over to me during the charrette and said, "I love working with the people who go on charrettes. This is great, isn't it?"

He was right.

I'On was one of the charrettes I went on with Charles Barrett, now deceased. Charles was a unique talent, who was a master of perspective. His technique was also unique.

Charles would surround himself with local and archetypal images before pulling out a new sheet to draw on. He would then start at the upper left-hand corner of the sheet and work his way diagonally to the lower right-hand corner. When he was a quarter of the way through the process, there would be a diagonal line a quarter of the way from one corner to the other: Everything to the left of the diagonal was almost completely rendered. To the right of the diagonal was blank.

If you look closely at some of Charles's drawings, you will find a few dachshunds here and there. But that's another story.

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may or may not be necessary for the financial success of the project, but it is not good urbanism. *More importantly:* With respect to NU projects generally, I think they should be designed to be "connectable." That is to say, I would propose as a *general* rule of thumb that the edges of NU greenfield developments be designed as either streets or alleys in order to make possible connections to future adjacent neighborhood developments. I realize that this might go against the wishes of residents much if not most of the time. But this resistance to connectivity is itself *anti-urban*; it should be one of the objectives of new urbanists to be persistent in doing the correct urban thing, and to lead rather than follow the culture wherever possible.

Third: I am pleased to see that the boroughs of Shelmore, Montrose and Westlake all have sites designated for civic buildings (and I am distressed that the boroughs of Ponsbury and Eastlake appear to have no such sites). The sites generally are located in such a way as to allow the

Koffka/Karow-Nord From page 17

pleasant, the vistas unobstructed. Between visits, Karow-Nord developed a spirit of its own. Some designs had veered from John and Buzz's intentions so blatantly that they would make an extra trip to Berlin to plead with the developer, city or fellow architect to make a change, always respectful not to encroach on the design autonomy of others. At times, though, what looked unacceptable on the drawing board became less objectionable once it had been built and integrated into the context of scale, landscape, streets, colors and materials. Our own town started to surprise us.

More control might have resulted in a more unified architecture. Some details that still strike us as unfortunate, misguided, even ugly, would have been deleted from the drawings. For example, had our design guidelines become a rule instead of a recommendation, all buildings would have had low brick bases, as this was a feature of the surrounding villages. As it turned out, the schools and daycare centers all were faced in brick, as we recommended, to distinguish the public from the private; yet only some of our apartment blocks had brick bases, maybe as a nod to us as master planners. Most others did not, and in one quarter supervised by a developer other than the lead firm, some housing blocks were faced in brick all the way to the eaves. Disappointed at first, we made our peace with these disparities quickly as Karow began to look more and more like a real city.

At my most recent visit, in December 2000, seeing Karow-Nord for the first time as a tourist, not a team member, what astonished me was how natural it felt. Yes, there was the delightful Christmas Market right where we had planned a space for it, but it wasn't that picturesque spot that excited me. It was the people going about their business, frantic in their pursuit of Christmas presents, running to the many busses piling up on Karower Chaussee, huddling in the cold air at the pedestrian crossings, hurrying past storefronts with tacky season's decorations. They did not notice how the plan worked, what axis they traveled, how public transitioned to private. They went about their business in a normal town. Suddenly I remembered a quote from architect Peter de Bretteville who stated that architecture should interfere with human life as little as possible. That December it sure felt like that could be achieved.

future civic buildings to terminate an axis either frontally or obliquely; and this, too is good. But I would change one thing about several of these civic building sites. Many of them designate a small block for a civic building and then locate the building within the block (in a manner reminiscent of the classic American Midwestern courthouse square). But I think it would be better in most cases to let the block become a public square, and move the civic building so it fronts the public square. I'On seems destined to become a place of good streets — no small accomplishment! But it would be even better were it to acquire some good public square fronted by good civic buildings.

Fourth: Related to Point Three, concerted effort should be made by the founders to ensure that I'On's civic buildings be grander in scale (and, if possible materials) than the housing stock. This will be a challenge, because the quality — if not monumentality — of I'On's housing stock is high. I pass along one possible strategy, suggested to me by Robert Davi

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