

# Is Support for Traditionally Designed Communities Growing?

## Evidence From Two National Surveys

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**Problem:** Many voices within the planning community have called for replacement of the dominant model of suburban development with a more traditional style of development. Traditionally designed communities, featuring a mix of residential and commercial land uses and pedestrian connections between these uses, offer many potential environmental, social, and health benefits. Adoption of policies that encourage traditionally designed communities depends in part on public support, but evidence on the extent and nature of such support is largely anecdotal.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study was to assess trends in public support for traditionally designed communities and to provide insights into factors associated with that support.

**Methods:** The study uses data from comparable surveys of nationally representative samples of American households in 2003 and 2005. The surveys described a traditionally designed community and asked respondents, "How much would you support the development of communities like this in your area?" The survey also included questions on respondents' socio-demographic characteristics, attitudes on a variety of issues, expectations about the likelihood traditionally designed communities would have certain characteristics, and how important these characteristics were to them.

**Results and conclusions:** In 2003, 44% of respondents expressed support for developing traditionally designed communities in the areas where they lived. This support increased significantly to 59% in 2005. Support was strong among all groups except rural residents, and increased among

many voices within the planning community have called for replacing the dominant model of suburban development with a more traditional style of development.<sup>1</sup> A growing body of evidence shows that traditionally designed communities, featuring a mix of residential and commercial land uses and pedestrian connections between these uses, offer many potential environmental, social, and health benefits.<sup>2</sup> Whatever the benefits, few such communities are likely to be built unless the public is in favor of them, raising the question: Does the public support the adoption of policies that encourage traditionally designed communities?

all groups between 2003 and 2005. This support was positively related to expectations that such communities would be child-friendly and negatively related to expectations that they would have space limitations. Respondents perceived such communities as likely to allow older people to live independently, and they also rated this characteristic as highly important.

**Takeaway for practice:** Public support for developing traditionally designed communities is strong, widespread, and growing. Although such communities find less support in rural areas and raise concerns over limited space, they have appeal as child- and elderly-friendly places. Though there is evidence that supply of traditionally designed communities does not meet demand, this evidence of growing support may foster policy changes that will help to close the gap.

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The answer seems to be yes, at least when such policies are a part of broader smart growth programs (Katz, 2002; Kirby & Hollander, 2005). In 2000, according to the American Planning Association (2002), 533 state or local ballot initiatives in 38 states focused on issues of planning or smart growth and 70% of these were approved by voters. In a 2000 national survey, 47% of respondents strongly supported and 30% somewhat supported policies to improve the walking environment, even if it meant less money for highways (Belden Russonello & Stewart, 2000). In 2004, support for smart growth translated into the election of a slate of leaders who strongly support smart growth, according to Smart Growth America (2005). According to one observer, the 2006 election was "pivotal in the progress toward better planning and more livable neighborhoods" (Goldberg, 2007, p. 7). However, this evidence is largely anecdotal and offers few insights into who supports smart growth in general and traditionally designed communities in particular.

In this article, we use comparable surveys of representative national samples of adults in 2003 and 2005 to gauge public support for development of traditionally designed communities and whether it is increasing, to understand individual and household characteristics associated with such support, and to discover which characteristics of traditionally designed communities are associated with such support.

## Methods

In May 2003, the public relations company Porter Novelli<sup>3</sup> conducted its annual *ConsumerStyles* mail survey of U.S. adults to study a variety of consumer behaviors, mailing a total of 10,000 questionnaires to a nationally representative sample of American households participating in a consumer opinion panel run by the market research firm Synovate.<sup>4</sup> A total of 5,873 questionnaires were returned, for a response rate of 59%. Porter Novelli used a similar method to sample 20,000 households for the 2005 survey resulting in 12,630 completed surveys, a response rate of 63%. The resulting databases were poststratified and weighted according to U.S. Census benchmarks on age, sex, race/ethnicity, income, and household size to reduce potential under-response or over-response biases within categories of these demographic variables (Korn & Graubard, 1999; Lohr, 1999). Research comparing survey results from samples drawn from Synovate's panel with results from national random samples show very close agreement (MarketFacts, 1994; Pollard, 2002; Putnam, 2000).

In each survey, respondents read the following description, making it our definition of a traditionally designed community in this article:

In recent years, there has been a greater interest in developing communities with a town design in place of today's suburbs. Such communities have a town center that is surrounded by residential neighborhoods. The town center has small shops, restaurants, government buildings, churches, and public transit (bus, rail) stops. Residential neighborhoods are clustered around the town center, providing easy access to work and shopping. Each neighborhood has a variety of housing types (apartments, townhomes, single family homes) and houses are built on smaller lots and are closer to the street.

Streets are designed to accommodate cars, pedestrians, and bicyclists. In residential areas streets are narrower, slower, and quieter with sidewalks, trees and on-street parking. In commercial areas, sidewalks are wide and comfortable, streets are lined with trees, and parking lots are less conspicuous. The community includes a network of parks and trails for walking and biking. It also has a clearly defined boundary in order to preserve open space for parks, farmlands, and forests.

Respondents were then asked, "How much would you support the development of communities like this in your area?" and asked to respond using a seven-point scale from "would not support at all" (1) to "would fully support" (7). Choosing the midpoint (4) on this scale meant a respondent "would somewhat support" the development of communities like this. A second question asked "If there were communities like this available in your area, how much would you want to live in one?" Again, they were to respond on a seven-point scale, this time ranging from "definitely not" (1) to "definitely would" (7). The midpoint (4) in the range of responses to this question was "maybe." We use these questions to measure *support* of (in the first case) and *interest* in (in the second case) traditionally designed communities within the context of the respondent's existing community. As noted above, the phrase *traditionally designed communities* was not used in the survey; instead, respondents were asked to answer questions in reference to the description above. These questions were identical in the 2003 and 2005 surveys.

It is important to note that responses to this type of stated preference question are not necessarily good predictors of behavior. A more sophisticated means of measuring preferences is to ask respondents to choose between alterna-

tives while considering the relative costs of those alternatives, thereby eliciting more considered responses that may better predict actual behavior (see Hensher, 1994). Also, because respondents in this survey were not presented with an alternative, we cannot be certain whether they compared the possibility of traditionally designed communities to the possibility of more typical suburban developments, or to the possibility of no development at all, or did not make any comparison when answering the questions. Though this type of question is unsuited to forecasting behavior, it has long been accepted for measuring attitudes (Parry & Crossley, 1950), including for planning purposes (Federal Highway Administration, 1999).

Our analysis primarily focuses on support for traditionally designed communities. We assume that this measure is more likely to predict behavior than our measure of interest in living in them for the reason that acting on one's support (e.g., in the form of voting for approval of development proposals on ballot initiatives or supporting city council candidates who favor such developments) is easier than acting on one's interest (which involves the expense and inconvenience of moving). It is important to note that the survey question asked about support for such developments "in your area," rather than "next door" or "within your neighborhood," contexts in which support is likely to be lower. Although the share of respondents indicating high levels of support on the survey may not correspond to the share that would support them through actual behavior, the change in this measure between 2003 and 2005 is likely to be a valid indicator of a shift in attitude within the population.

The survey also contained questions designed to capture respondents' perceptions of the likelihood that communities like these would have a variety of positive and negative characteristics, such as being safe, environmentally friendly, or too crowded (on a five-point scale from "very unlikely" to "very likely"). The survey included a parallel set of questions on the importance they placed on such characteristics (on a five-point scale from "not very important" to "very important"). Participants were surveyed about their own residential locations, sociodemographic attributes, and attitudes toward health, the environment, leisure, and politics (see Table 1 for descriptions of variables). In several cases we created scales using principal components analysis with varimax rotation to address potential collinearity between related independent variables. The wording of these questions was identical in the 2003 and 2005 surveys, although a small number of questions were excluded from the 2005 survey, leading to slight differences in the estimated scales.

To obtain an objective indicator of the design of respondents' current communities of residence, we ap-

pendent data from the 2000 U.S. Census to the survey data based on the census tract for the home address of each respondent. Items included population density, share of housing units built after specified dates, share of housing units of different types, median number of rooms, numbers of vehicles owned, and mode of travel to work. We used principal components analysis with varimax rotation in an exploratory manner to identify dimensions underlying these items, and constructed an urban scale and a suburban scale based on this analysis by averaging the identified items (see Table 1). These results are consistent with those of Bagley, Mokhtarian, and Kitamura (2002), who found that two scales better represented the differences in physical characteristics between urban and suburban neighborhoods than a single scale ranging from suburban to urban.

We used ordinary least squares regression to develop a series of models predicting support for traditionally designed communities using data from the 2003 survey. We first estimated a base model using only sociodemographic characteristics, and then added one set of variables at a time. We used the change in adjusted  $R^2$  from the base model to measure the amount of variance explained by each new set of variables. Since we did not aim to fully explain variations in support with these models, but rather to examine the relative importance of different factors in explaining that variation, we do not report a final model with all significant variables. It is important to note that the low  $R^2$  values for all of the models suggest that most of the variation in support is left unexplained by the variables tested.

We used two-sided independent-sample  $t$ -tests to test differences in mean support between 2003 and 2005 within categories of respondents. We used  $z$ -scores to test change in the share of a category of respondents indicating support (which we defined as choosing 5, 6, or 7 on a seven-point scale) between 2003 and 2005. We also examined changes from 2003 to 2005 in respondents' reports of how important particular characteristics of traditionally designed communities were to them, and how they rated the likelihood that such communities would have those characteristics.

## Results

### Level of Support and Changes in Level of Support

The mean level of support of the 2003 national sample of adults was 4.37 on a seven-point scale, with nearly 44% expressing support for developing more traditionally designed communities in their own areas (see Table 2).

Table 1. Potential correlates of support for traditionally designed communities.

Variable name	Number of items [Values]	Description, sample items	Cronbach's alpha
<b>Sociodemographics</b>			
Age	1 [19–99]	Respondent's age Years	N/A
Gender	1 [1, 2]	Respondent's gender Female, Male	N/A
Education	1 [0, 1]	Respondent's education level High school degree or less, some college or more education	N/A
Marital status	1 [0, 1]	Respondent's marital status Not married (single, divorced, separated, widowed), married	N/A
Race/ethnicity	1 [0, 1]	Respondent's race/ethnicity Other, White non-Hispanic	N/A
Renter status	1 [0, 1]	Living arrangements Do not rent, renter	N/A
Children	1 [0, 1]	Have at least one child under 18 No, yes	N/A
<b>Health orientation</b>			
Walking	1 [0, 1]	Respondent reports walking as a regular physical activity No, Yes	N/A
Activity index	9 [0–9]	Number of activities respondent participates in regularly out of nine Baseball or softball, basketball, biking, exercise class or gym, jogging or running, skiing, soccer, swimming, and tennis	N/A
Physical activity amount	2 [0–600]	Average number of minutes of reported physical activity per day calculated by multiplying days active by minutes active per day and dividing by seven	N/A
Healthy diet scale	8 [1–5]	Interest in eating healthy foods such as low-cholesterol, fortified, low-calorie, and low-fat foods 1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree	0.85
Pro-health scale	6 [1–5]	Interest in looking and being healthy, living a long life, and actively trying to prevent disease and illness 1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree	0.84
<b>Environmental attitudes</b>			
Tax support	1 [0, 1]	Supports tax dollars being spent on environmental protection No, yes	N/A
Importance of environment	1 [1–5]	Importance of the environment as a cause 1=not at all important, 5=very important	N/A
Recycling habits	9 [0–9]	Reported number of materials usually recycled out of nine Newspaper, phone books, plastic bottles, aluminum cans, cardboard, steel food cans, glass bottles and jars, magazines and catalogs, white office paper	N/A
<b>Leisure orientation</b>			
Coffee frequency	1 [1–6]	Frequency of going to gourmet coffee shops 6=daily, 5=weekly, 4=monthly, 3=a few times per year, 2=yearly, 1=less often or never	N/A
Theaters/plays	1 [0, 1]	Reports attending theater/plays/symphony regularly as a leisure-time activity No, yes	N/A
Movies	1 [0, 1]	Reports going out to the movies as a leisure-time activity done regularly No, yes	N/A
Restaurants	1 [0, 1]	Reports restaurants/dining out as a leisure-time activity done regularly No, yes	N/A
Gardening	1 [0, 1]	Reports gardening as a leisure-time activity done regularly No, yes	N/A
Dog ownership	1 [0, 1]	Currently keeps a dog at home as a pet No, yes	N/A

Table 1 (continued).

Variable name	Number of items [Values]	Description, sample items	Cronbach's alpha
<b>Political orientation</b>			
Financial issues	1 [1–5]	Political attitudes toward financial issues 1=very liberal, 2=somewhat liberal, 3=in the middle, 4=somewhat conservative, 5=very conservative	N/A
Social issues	1 [1–5]	Political attitudes toward social issues 1=very liberal, 2=somewhat liberal, 3=in the middle, 4=somewhat conservative, 5=very conservative	N/A
<b>Location</b>			
Perceived location	1 [0, 1]	Self-description of current home Non-rural, rural	N/A
Urban scale <sup>a</sup>	5 [0–1]	Density>12,500 persons per sq. mile; share of units 5 or more attached; share of households with no vehicles; share of commutes by public transit; share of commutes by walk or bike	0.74
Suburban scale <sup>a</sup>	4 [0–1]	Share of single detached units; share of units owner occupied; median number of rooms in top third; vehicles per household in top third	0.77
<b>Respondent's rating of the likelihood traditionally designed communities will have certain characteristics</b>			
Environmental/commute scale	6 [1–5]	Likelihood community would reduce air/water pollution, be less damaging to the environment, preserve green space, reduce traffic, reduce commuting times to work, lower commuting costs 1=very unlikely, 5=very likely	0.90
Walking scale	3 [1–5]	Likelihood community would enable people to walk or bike to work, shopping, public transportation 1=very unlikely, 5=very likely	0.90
Child-friendly scale	4 [1–5]	Likelihood community would be safe for kids to play in, allow kids to walk or bike to school, be culturally diverse, provide good public schools 1=very unlikely, 5=very likely	0.79
Limited-space scale	6 [1–5]	Likelihood community would not have enough parking space, cost too much to live in, have houses that are too small, have yards that are too small, be too crowded, not allow enough privacy 1=very unlikely, 5=very likely	0.88
<b>Respondent's rating of the importance of certain characteristics of traditionally designed communities</b>			
Environment scale	3 [1–5]	Personally important to help reduce air/water pollution, help protect the environment, preserve green space 1=not at all important, 5=very important	0.93
Commuting scale	2 [1–5]	Personally important to have a quick commute to work, have a cheap commute to work 1=not at all important, 5=very important	0.91
Walking scale	3 [1–5]	Personally important to be able to walk or bike to work, shopping, public transportation 1=not at all important, 5=very important	0.88
Child-friendly scale	4 [1–5]	Personally important to live in a neighborhood where it is safe for kids to play, where kids can walk or bike to school, culturally diverse neighborhood, have good public schools 1 = not at all important, 5 = very important	0.72
Space scale	2 [1–5]	Personally important to have a large house, have a house with a large yard 1=not at all important, 5=very important	0.80

Note:

a. Based on data from 2000 U.S. Census of Population and Housing for census tract of respondent's home address.

In 2005, the mean level of support was 5.01, with 59.2% expressing support. The increase is statistically significant and large enough to suggest a substantial change in attitudes.

Those expressing interest in living in a traditionally designed community showed significant though smaller increases from 2003 to 2005 (see Table 2), suggesting that change in support may be a precursor to change in interest. Though support and interest are strongly correlated, it is possible to support the development of traditionally designed communities without wanting to live in one. However, it seems unlikely that those interested in living in traditionally designed communities would not support the development of such communities. Support may have increased more than interest owing to growing recognition of these communities' potential social benefits, even among individuals who do not expect to benefit personally. Interest may also be limited because people are unwilling to relocate their residences for any reason.

### Individual Characteristics Associated With Support for Traditionally Designed Communities

In 2003, support for traditionally designed communities was strong across nearly all subgroups of the sample, as defined by the dichotomous variables (see Table 3). Only rural residents were on average unsupportive of traditionally designed communities, with a mean score of 3.78 on the seven-point scale.

The regression models in Table 4 show that socio-demographic characteristics as a set explained the largest proportion of variance. Race/ethnicity was chief among sociodemographic characteristics, as shown by the squared partial correlation, with Whites reporting lower support than other racial/ethnic groups. Environmental attitudes explained the next most variance in support, followed by health orientation and leisure orientation, with measures of political attitudes explaining the least variance.

Among individual variables, reported rural location had one of the strongest associations with support for traditionally designed communities, and it had a negative effect. This could reflect general disapproval of development in the local area rather than a dislike of traditionally designed communities in particular; the survey question does not allow us to analyze this possibility. Neither urban nor suburban location had a statistically significant effect, indicating that urban and suburban residents are indistinguishable with respect to support.

Not only did overall mean support scores and shares of respondents expressing support increase between 2003 and 2005, support increased across all population segments we measured (see Table 3). The same groups displayed higher average levels of support in 2003 and 2005, except that the difference between respondents with and without children became insignificant in 2005, and women expressed significantly higher support than men in 2005, but not in 2003. Support among rural residents increased to an

Table 2. Attitudes toward traditionally designed communities,<sup>a</sup> 2003 and 2005.

	Mean rating <sup>b</sup>			% choosing ratings of 5, 6, or 7		
	2003	2005	Change	2003	2005	Change
<b>Support</b>						
<i>N</i>	5,713	4,871		2,502	2,884	
How much would you support the development of communities like this in your area?	4.37	5.01	0.64***	43.8%	59.2%	15.4%***
<b>Interest</b>						
<i>N</i>	5,709	4,868		2,535	2,434	
How much would you want to live in one?	4.39	4.65	0.26***	44.3%	50.0%	6.7%***

Notes:

a. As described in the survey.

b. On a scale from 1 to 7, with 7 being the highest rating.

\*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 3. Changes in mean level of support by respondent characteristics and attitudes, 2003–2005.

	2003		2005		2003–2005	
	Mean	Signif. dif. between categories	Mean	Signif. dif. between categories	Change	Signif. dif. between years
Gender				**		
Female	4.40		5.06		0.66	***
Male	4.34		4.95		0.61	***
Education		**		**		
High school or less	4.19		4.77		0.58	***
College or more	4.42		5.09		0.67	***
Marital status		**		**		
Married	4.28		4.87		0.59	***
Not married	4.50		5.22		0.72	***
Race/ethnicity		**		**		
White	4.23		4.93		0.70	***
Non-White	4.73		5.19		0.46	***
Children		**				
No kids	4.29		5.03		0.74	***
Kids	4.49		4.96		0.47	***
Renter status		**		**		
Do not rent	4.27		4.92		0.65	***
Rent	4.66		5.27		0.61	***
Perceived location		**		**		
Rural	3.78		4.52		0.74	***
Non-rural	4.51		5.12		0.61	***
Walking		**		**		
No	4.21		4.91		0.70	***
Yes	4.48		5.08		0.60	***
Tax support for environment		**		**		
No	4.34		4.96		0.62	***
Yes	4.48		5.16		0.68	***
Theater/plays		**		**		
No	4.25		4.94		0.69	***
Yes	4.70		5.29		0.59	***
Movies		**		**		
No	4.13		4.82		0.69	***
Yes	4.62		5.21		0.59	***
Gardening						
No	4.40		5.01		0.61	***
Yes	4.34		5.00		0.66	***
Dog ownership		**		**		
No	4.43		5.05		0.62	***
Yes	4.29		4.94		0.65	***

\*\* $p < .01$  \*\*\* $p < .001$ 

average of 4.52, though less than half of rural respondents (47.6%) expressed support in 2005. The increase in support across all population segments suggests a widespread and increasingly positive perception of traditionally designed communities, at least as described in this survey.

### Characteristics of Traditionally Designed Communities Associated With Support

As shown in Table 5, on average, respondents to the 2003 survey thought it very likely that the community described in the survey would allow children to walk or

Table 4. Regression models predicting support for traditionally designed communities based on their expected characteristics, 2003.

	Standardized coefficient	<i>p</i>	Squared partial correlation	<i>N</i>	Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	Change in adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> from basic model
<b>Basic model</b>				4,864	0.046	n/a
Age	-0.099	0.000	0.0074			
Gender: male	-0.013	0.383	0.0001			
Education: college or more	0.058	0.000	0.0032			
Marital status: married	-0.035	0.030	0.0009			
Race/ethnicity: White	-0.122	0.000	0.0139			
Renter status: renter	0.045	0.004	0.0017			
Children: yes	0.035	0.028	0.0010			
<b>Basic model plus expectations about health orientation</b>				4,773	0.076	0.030
Walking	0.041	0.005	0.0015			
Activity index	0.036	0.016	0.0011			
Physical activity amount	-0.019	0.170	0.0004			
Pro-health scale	0.120	0.000	0.0100			
Healthy-diet scale	0.077	0.000	0.0040			
<b>Basic model plus expectations about environmental attitudes</b>				4,762	0.081	0.035
Tax support	-0.033	0.025	0.0010			
Importance of environment	0.166	0.000	0.0243			
Recycling habits	0.064	0.000	0.0036			
<b>Basic model plus expectations about leisure orientation</b>				4,773	0.068	0.022
Coffee frequency	0.050	0.001	0.0023			
Theaters/plays	0.088	0.000	0.0066			
Movies	0.058	0.000	0.0027			
Restaurants	0.040	0.008	0.0014			
Gardening	0.012	0.392	0.0001			
Dog ownership	-0.030	0.038	0.0008			
<b>Basic model plus expectations about political attitudes</b>				4,641	0.054	0.008
Financial issues	-0.026	0.183	0.0004			
Social issues	-0.061	0.002	0.0019			
<b>Basic model plus location</b>				4,586	0.067	0.021
Rural	-0.144	0.000	0.0196			
Suburban scale	-0.023	0.177	0.0004			
Urban scale	0.015	0.377	0.0002			

bike to school, enable people to walk or bike to public transit and shopping, and be a safe place for kids to play. They also thought such communities were likely to preserve green space. Respondents found it least likely that the described community would have insufficient parking or houses that were too small, be too crowded, or have prob-

lems with crime, all negative attributes, though even these were seen as at least somewhat likely, with average scores above 2.5 on the five-point scale.

How important respondents found certain characteristics was more varied, as Table 6 shows. Most important was living in a neighborhood with a low crime rate, at



4.70. Other conditions respondents rated as very important were being able to live independently as one gets older, and owning a car. They rated characteristics related to physical activity (e.g., being able to walk or bike to shopping) lowest, rating them as unimportant on average, and more than one full point below the next lowest characteristic, having a large house.

Several mismatches between characteristics perceived as likely and those rated personally important emerge from the data. Respondents saw an ability to walk as likely in these communities, but not important. They considered a low crime rate important, but expected some problems with crime. Qualities perceived to be both highly likely and highly important included living independently when older, having free time to spend with family, and having good public schools. These qualities may be important selling points for traditionally designed communities.

The models explaining support for traditionally designed communities in 2003 (see Table 7) show it was strongly associated with the characteristics respondents perceive as likely for these communities. After accounting for sociodemographic characteristics, expectations measured by the environment/commute scale, the walking scale, the child-friendly scale, and the limited-space scale (see Table 1) were all significant. Together these expectations raised the adjusted  $R^2$  to 0.182 from 0.046 for the basic model, meaning these expectations explained nearly four times the variation explained by sociodemographic characteristics alone. The most powerful at explaining variation was the limited-space scale, which had a negative association with support. In other words, support was lower among individuals who thought traditionally designed communities likely to be crowded and lacking space, a result that may be related to low support among residents of rural areas.

Table 5. Expectations about characteristics of traditionally designed communities, 2003–2005.

	Mean rating of likelihood <sup>a</sup>		
	2003	2005	Change 2003–2005
Allow kids to walk or bike to school	3.95	3.97	0.02
Be safe for kids to play in neighborhood	3.87	3.90	0.03
Enable people to walk/bike to public transit	3.85	3.86	0.01
Enable people to walk/bike to shopping	3.83	3.85	0.02
Enable older adults to live independently	3.72	3.84	0.12***
Encourage close relationships with neighbors	3.70	3.78	0.08***
Preserve green space	3.74	3.78	0.04†
Allow more free time for family activities	3.55	3.68	0.13***
Enable people to walk/bike to work	3.65	3.66	0.01
Provide good public schools	3.50	3.61	0.11***
Reduce traffic	3.53	3.55	0.02
Reduce commute times to work	3.47	3.50	0.03
Be less damaging to the environment	3.42	3.48	0.06**
Lower commuting costs	3.46	3.46	0.00
Cost too much to live in	3.45	3.46	0.01
Reduce air/water pollution	3.39	3.45	0.06**
Be culturally diverse	3.31	3.42	0.11***
Not allow enough privacy	3.39	3.41	0.02
Have yards that are too small	3.39	3.40	0.01
Be too crowded	3.24	3.26	0.02
Have houses that are too small	3.23	3.23	0.00
Not have enough parking space	3.04	3.10	0.06**
Have problems with crime	2.79	2.85	0.06**

Note:

a. Respondents rated the likelihood that the communities like those described in the survey would have these attributes on a five-point scale ranging from “very unlikely” (1) to “very likely” (5).

† $p < .10$     \*\* $p < .01$     \*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 6. Importance of characteristics of traditionally designed communities to respondents, 2003–2005.

	Mean rating of importance <sup>a</sup>		Change 2003–2005
	2003	2005	
Live in a neighborhood with a low crime rate	4.70	4.70	0.00
Be able to live independently as you get older	4.66	4.66	0.00
Own a car	4.64	4.62	–0.02
Have free time to spend with your family	4.63	4.60	–0.03†
Live in a neighborhood where it is safe for kids to play	4.48	4.46	–0.02
Have good public schools in your neighborhood	4.23	4.22	–0.01
Live in a neighborhood where kids can walk/bike to school	3.95	4.01	0.06†
Preserve green space	3.90	4.00	0.10***
Have privacy from your neighbors	4.02	3.99	–0.03
Help protect the environment	3.83	3.91	0.08***
Have less traffic on the roads where you live	3.84	3.90	0.06**
Live in a neighborhood that is not very expensive	3.83	3.90	0.07**
Help reduce air/water pollution	3.76	3.83	0.07***
Have a cheap commute to work	3.62	3.71	0.09***
Have a quick commute to work	3.64	3.67	0.03
Have a house with a large yard	3.63	3.64	0.01
Have close relationships with your neighbors	3.33	3.39	0.06**
Live in a culturally diverse neighborhood	3.29	3.34	0.05†
Have a large house	3.25	3.23	–0.02
Being able to walk or bike to shopping	2.18	2.52	0.34***
Being able to walk or bike to work	2.18	2.48	0.30***
Be able to walk or bike to public transportation	2.19	2.44	0.25***

Note:

a. Respondents rated how important these conditions were to them on a five-point scale ranging from “not very important” (1) to “very important” (5).

† $p < .10$     \*\* $p < .01$     \*\*\* $p < .001$

Child-friendly characteristics explained a large share of variation and were positively associated with support.

Importance of community characteristics was less strongly associated with support for traditionally designed communities (see Table 7). After accounting for socio-demographics, the scales measuring the importance of the environment, commuting, walking, and child-friendliness were all significant in the model; that measuring the importance of limited space was not significant. Together the importance scales explained less than one third of the variance explained by perceived likelihood (changing the adjusted  $R^2$  by 0.058 versus 0.182), but still explained considerably more variance than any of the models in Table 4. The importance scale relating to the environment had the greatest explanatory power, followed closely by that relating to child-friendliness. In other words, respondents who said it was personally important to help reduce air and water pollution, protect the environment, preserve green

space, and reduce pollution were more likely to support traditionally designed communities, as were respondents who said it was important to them to live in a neighborhood friendly to children.

Increases in respondents' perceived likelihood ratings of 10 out of 23 of the traditionally designed community characteristics between 2003 and 2005 were statistically significant (see Table 5). The expectation that traditionally designed communities would allow more free time for family activities increased the most in absolute terms, followed by expectations that they would enable older adults to live independently and would be culturally diverse. Several expectations related to the environment also increased (that these communities would preserve green space and reduce air and water pollution). Two negative expectations increased (that traditionally designed communities would not have enough parking space and would have problems with crime), though they remained at the bottom of the

Table 7. Regression models predicting support for traditionally designed communities, 2003.

	Standardized coefficient	<i>p</i>	Squared partial correlation	<i>N</i>	Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	Change in adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> from basic model
<b>Basic model</b>				4,864	0.046	n/a
<b>Basic model plus expectations about attributes</b>				4,634	0.228	0.182
Environment/commute scale	0.129	0.000	0.009			
Walking scale	0.105	0.000	0.008			
Child-friendly scale	0.211	0.000	0.024			
Limited-space scale	-0.176	0.000	0.029			
<b>Basic model plus importance of attributes to respondents</b>				4,777	0.104	0.058
Environment scale	0.240	0.000	0.014			
Commuting scale	0.053	0.009	0.001			
Walking scale	0.094	0.000	0.004			
Child-friendly scale	0.249	0.000	0.012			
Space scale	0.009	0.696	0.000			

list. The perception that houses would be too small was low on the list and did not increase between 2003 and 2005.

Increases in the importance ratings respondents' gave to 13 out of 23 of the traditionally designed community characteristics between 2003 and 2005 were statistically significant (see Table 6). The largest increases were for the characteristics with the lowest average importance, namely those involving walking and biking. Although these characteristics remained at the bottom of the list, in 2005 their mean scores were near the mid-point of the 5-point scale.

It is intriguing that perceived likelihood ratings increased the most for social characteristics of traditionally designed neighborhoods, while importance ratings increased the most for walking/biking characteristics. People's expectations of greater social benefits from traditionally designed communities may stem from increasing criticism of current conditions in suburbs. Growing appreciation of the need for physical activity and concern over global warming and other environmental issues could explain the increase in importance of related characteristics between 2003 and 2005. For example, the connection between suburban sprawl and obesity received widespread media attention for the first time between 2003 and 2005, including cover stories in *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines.

## Conclusions

This study provides evidence of strong, widespread, and growing support for the development of traditionally designed communities. But other studies provide evidence that demand for traditionally designed communities exceeds their supply (Eppli & Tu, 1999; Ewing, Bartholomew, Winkelman, Walters, & Chen, 2007; Kirby & Hollander, 2004; Levine, Inam, Werbel, & Torng, 2002; Myers & Gearin, 2001).

So why has public support not translated into adequate supply? First, stated support does not always translate into political support. For example, a 2005 ballot referendum on a proposed high-density, traditionally designed development in Davis, CA (City of Davis, 2007), a city long known for the strong environmental orientation of its residents, lost by 20 percentage points. Second, policy is hard to change even when there is support. An increase in the availability of traditionally designed communities would require modifications to laws, regulations, codes, guidelines, standards, and funding formulae at multiple levels of government (Schilling & Linton, 2005) that are likely to face opposition by some affected parties. Third, development is a slow process; it may take months or even years before new policies manifest themselves in completed development

projects. Supply will not increase without public support, but public support alone does not guarantee that the gap between supply and demand will close.

For those who seek to reduce the gap between supply and demand for traditionally designed communities, the findings presented here can be helpful in at least two ways. First, the analysis sheds light on the segments of the population in which support is strongest and in which it is weakest. Most significantly, traditionally designed communities are likely to be harder to sell in rural areas than within metropolitan areas. The political leanings of the population may matter less than race, ethnicity, and environmental orientation. Second, our analysis provides insights into which characteristics of traditionally designed communities are most closely associated with popular support. These should be given high priority in the design process and can be the basis for marketing campaigns to increase support for projects that provide them. In particular, the results suggest that traditionally designed communities are seen as child-friendly places and as places where the elderly can age in place, but concerns over limited space will have to be addressed. A better understanding of public support for traditionally designed communities on the part of planners as well as public officials and private developers is a step toward achieving the numerous environmental, social, and health benefits those communities could bring.

## Notes

1. In 1996, the Congress for the New Urbanism adopted a charter that advocates for "compact, pedestrian friendly, and mixed-use" neighborhoods, in which "many activities of daily living" are found "within walking distance" and where "interconnected networks of streets" reduce driving distances and increase walking (Congress for the New Urbanism [CNU], 1996). The Smart Growth Network (2007) defines 10 principles of smart growth, directing communities to "mix land uses," "create walkable neighborhoods," and "foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place," among other things. The American Planning Association has published Planning Advisory Service (PAS) reports that help communities implement policies supportive of new urbanist (CNU, 2004) and traditional neighborhood design (Arendt, 2004).
2. Research indicates that these communities are consistently associated with more walking and cycling for transportation (Saelens & Handy, in press; Transportation Research Board-Institute of Medicine, 2005), more total physical activity (Frank, Engelke, & Schmid, 2003; Heath et al., 2006), lower risk of obesity (Booth, Pinkston, & Poston, 2005), and lower risk of multiple chronic diseases (Frumkin, Frank, & Jackson, 2004; Sturm & Cohen, 2004). As part of a larger smart growth strategy, traditionally designed communities have the potential to improve regional air quality, reduce petroleum consumption, preserve farm land and open space, reduce government expenditures on various types of infrastructure, increase children's ability to walk and bike to school, improve social cohesion in the community, and address climate change (U. S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2001; Ewing et al., 2007;

Muro & Puentes, 2004; National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2005; Warnke, Houston, Jenkins, Silva, & Seward, 2004).

3. Porter Novelli is a public relations company based in Washington, DC. Their website is [www.porternovelli.com](http://www.porternovelli.com).

4. Synovate, Inc. is a market research company based in Chicago. Their website is [www.synovate.com](http://www.synovate.com)

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