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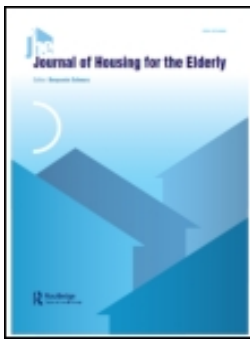


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Designing an Ageless Social Community: Adapting a New Urbanist Social Core to Suit Baby Boomers in Later Life

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ABSTRACT

Since 90% of older adults prefer aging in place (Wang, Shepley, & Rodiek, 2012), it is important that neighborhood design supports successful aging. Beyond basic needs, research indicates quality interaction is associated with positive health and well-being benefits, particularly for older adults. In this, design supporting social relationships plays an essential role. This study's purpose was to identify New Urbanist neighborhood and social space design attributes supporting older residents' physiological and social needs. This case study used keyword-in-context analysis with focus group interview data to identify domains supporting social interaction for residents aging in place including: *location factors, social factors, design factors, and programmatic factors.*

KEYWORDS

New Urbanism; Aging in Place; Social Spaces; Third Place; Traditional Neighborhood Design

Introduction

Census data (Administration on Aging, 2012) indicate the U.S. aging population is growing exponentially because of the baby boomer generation born between 1946 and 1964. With this diverse group—commonly referred to as boomers—reaching retirement age after 2010, the population aged 65+ is projected to soar to 73 million by 2030. Now, as when the baby boom generation began, there is a corresponding demand for suitable housing.

Prior to WWII's end and the start of the boomer generation, existing housing was organized by the traditional community model. Predating prevalent automobile use, these pedestrian-centered neighborhoods provided commercial cores within walking distance that provided many social opportunities at barbershops, cafés, and other gathering places. After the sudden population increase, there was simply not enough traditional housing available.

To meet the housing needed for the increased population, post-war housing developments were planned with the assumption that residents would own cars. Consequently, suburban developments, offering sprawling housing tracts interspersed occasionally with strip malls, replaced fields on town outskirts. With car

use, these malls served more people from a larger geographic area and were located much farther away from residences than traditional neighborhood gathering places. As a result, residents were less likely to make spontaneous stops at these more out-of-the-way strip mall establishments. Even when they did, they were less likely to see familiar faces. One unintended suburban side effect was the deterioration of community life (Oldenburg, 1999). Without the daily connection of traditional neighborhoods, residents were socially isolated, spending evenings at home with the TV rather than with neighbors at the local pub. According to Lerner (1957), by the mid-1950s, Americans were nostalgic for community found in traditional local establishments. With the accompanying isolation and loneliness, the disadvantages of suburbia outweighed its advantages.

For decades research made a strong case for engaging in social interaction and, correspondingly, the value of places supporting such interaction. Numerous studies consistently identified relationships linking engaging in quality social interaction with enhanced life satisfaction (Jang, Mortimer, Haley, & Graves, 2004) and positive health/well-being outcomes (Glass, De Leon, Bassuk, & Berkman, 2006; Krause, 2011). One type of community gathering place found to support social interaction among friends and acquaintances alike is called *third place*, as coined by Oldenburg (1999). The term *third place* covers a wide variety of public space types where people come together and interact.

As other countries continued to offer welcoming, lively gathering places, such as Britain's pubs and France's cafés, Oldenburg called for the reestablishment of similar gathering places in the United States to support quality social interaction. Despite their value, these lively social spaces have become increasingly rare in the United States. Oldenburg viewed suburban neighborhood design as the culprit for the loss of third places.

Despite years of research since the rise of suburbia, we do not know how to consistently design to support social interaction. Even so, there is increasing dialogue on this issue. For example, one World Health Organization (2002) goal is providing housing that supports daily interaction for seniors. With this increased awareness, several studies have examined the effect of third places on the health and well-being of older adults. For instance, one study reported that "A sense of belonging or attachment to place is believed to help maintain a sense of identity and well-being, and to facilitate successful adjustments in old age" (Wiles et al., 2009, p. 664). Additionally, service marketing research indicates that the social support older adult customers derive from third places has cathartic and restorative outcomes (Rosenbaum, Sweeney, & Windhorst, 2009). These studies tell us there are advantages found in engaging socially and developing relationships in a third-place venue as well as from the attachment formed to the place itself.

Further, the benefits of a lively social scene extend beyond individuals and provide advantages to whole neighborhoods. For instance, a good example of this is found in research about naturally occurring retirement communities (NORCs), areas not planned specifically for seniors yet have unusually high numbers of older adult residents. Hunt and Ross's (1990) seminal work on NORCs found a lively

neighborhood social scene was critical in attracting and retaining older adult residents. This suggests successful integration of commercial gathering places may be key to a new development becoming a thriving neighborhood. These financial implications further emphasize the value of understanding how to design third places. Despite the value of third places and beyond the control of designers of these spaces, not every café or pub evolves into a third place. While third places host life-enhancing interaction, many venues fall short of supporting interaction and simply meet a consumer need. Consequently, it is important to understand how to intentionally create third places as well as how to design a suitable residential community context for these gathering places.

Recreating traditional neighborhood designs

As the introduction of suburbia sparked the decline of third places, the need to find a way to meet residents' social needs led to a reaction against suburbia's shortcomings. To increase such social interaction among residents, a neighborhood design model for all ages, known as New Urbanism, was developed. This model provides walkable communities via mixed-use and high-density neighborhood designs (Shkuda, 2014; Toker, 2010). As opposed to more car-oriented neighborhood designs, residents walk from place to place, which opens more opportunities for social interaction. Specifically, New Urbanist design recommendations include locating neighborhood commercial/leisure venues within a 10-minute walk from residences (Crow, 1990). This directive leaves room for interpretation regarding the distance equaling a 10-minute walk. For instance, within 10 minutes, a healthy 25-year-old can walk a greater distance than someone who is 85. Despite good intentions, New Urbanist neighborhoods may have commercial/leisure spaces that are still too far for older residents. In addition to being an inconvenience, this challenges the independence of older residents if their driving privileges are lost due to age-related disability.

In late life, the walkability issue is compounded because age-related health problems (e.g., reduced vision) can lead to an inability to drive. Even without driving privileges, residents still need to visit the grocery, pharmacy, and other key commercial establishments. With distances too far for walking, this calls the feasibility of senior independent living into question. This makes walkable neighborhood design critical in supporting the independence of aging residents.

Based on an existing community nationally recognized as a New Urbanist model, this study is the first in a series informing an improved New Urbanist community design model. To support residents who prefer to age in place throughout the life span, this evolving neighborhood model, coined by Dr. Nichole Campbell as Ageless New Urbanism, seeks to address the current shortcomings of New Urbanist development. Examined from the viewpoint of using environmental design as a tool to support seniors' social lives, this study seeks to identify what factors attract and maintain the satisfaction of older adult residents aging in place in non-age-restricted residential communities. As the New Urbanist community design model is arguably the

most senior-friendly of contemporary neighborhood configurations, this research focuses specifically on a New Urbanist neighborhood. To guide the examination of the factors supporting seniors' social interaction within the designed environment, this research proposes the Ageless New Urbanism framework. To inform this ageless community model and develop this framework, the research question asked was: What attributes of New Urbanist neighborhood and social space design attract and support older adult residents' social needs for residents aging in place?

Method

As the first in a set of studies, this qualitative study aimed to understand how to better design New Urbanist neighborhoods and their social spaces for meeting residents' late-life social needs. This study's goal was to identify factors in the New Urbanist case-study community supporting residents aged 65+. To meet this goal, this case study utilized keyword-in-context analysis methods. Situated on the edge of a mid-sized university town, this Southeastern U.S. case-study neighborhood includes approximately 2,700 households, divided into 63 subneighborhoods. Housing in this community features a wide range of options, including apartments above commercial establishments or the garages of other residences, condominiums, row houses, cottages, mid-sized homes, and estate homes. Properties for sale in this neighborhood range from \$90,000 to more than \$1 million dollars. The community hosts an elementary school, lush vegetation throughout, a walking/biking trail, parks, a country club (for which resident membership is optional), and two commercial clusters, both offering numerous gathering places such as dessert shops, cafés, and pubs. These two areas are described below in greater detail.

"Market Square," a commercial cluster consisting of several strip mall-style buildings situated in an expansive parking lot, was clearly planned for automobiles rather than pedestrians. This cluster hosts a number of fast-food restaurants, a dry cleaner, and other shops/services that are mostly local except for a major grocery chain and bank.

Known as "The Village," the second commercial cluster is centrally located and hosts mixed-use buildings, narrow streets, and brick paver sidewalks. The Village's signature downtown offers doctor's offices, predominantly sit-down restaurants, and a dessert and coffee shop; it also holds a weekly farmer's market and other events. Rather than franchises, The Village's locally-owned businesses are situated among a playground, several parks, and a natural pond and fountain.

Data collection

About one third of the participants were recruited by placing various entry boxes (similar to ballot boxes) with study and participant incentive information in local facilities (e.g., restaurants, pubs, banks). Remaining participants were recruited by mailed invitations.

Utilizing the insights of 29 residents, the research team, consisting of the primary investigator and eight graduate assistants, conducted four focus groups with seven or

Table 1. Demographic information describe participants ($n = 29$).

Overall Category	Subcategory	Count	%
Ownership Status	Renters	0	0.00
	Homeowners	29	100
Length of time in Residence	<1 year	0	0.00
	1–5 Years	4	13.79
	6–10 Years	6	20.69
	Over 10	19	65.52
Mobility	No Mobility Aids Needed	25	86.21
	1 or More Mobility Aids Needed	4	13.79
Hearing	Decline to Answer	1	3.44
	No aid for hearing well	17	65.38
	Need aid for hearing speech well	10	35.48
Vision	Need hearing aid to hear poorly-moderately	1	3.44
	Decline to Answer	1	3.44
	I don't need any glasses/contacts to see well	5	17.24
	I only need glasses/contacts for reading	11	37.93
	I need glasses/contacts all the time to see well	12	41.38
	I need glasses/contacts all the time to see poorly to moderately well	0	0.00

eight older adult residents per group. Incentives included entry into a prize-drawing for free coffee for a year from a local cafe, grocery store gift cards, or other prizes. Upon arrival, participants were individually surveyed regarding their demographic information. Facilitated by the primary investigator, participants were asked questions developed from previous research about social space design. Lasting 50 to 70 minutes each, discussions were transcribed verbatim by a professional stenographer.

Participants

The 29 participants, 13 male and 16 female between the ages of 65 and 89, were residents of the case-study community. Of these homeowners, 18 (62%) lived in their home more than 10 years, six participants (21%) for six to 10 years, and four participants (14%) for one to five years. [Table 1](#) outlines the demographic details of these resident participants.

Analysis procedure

Focus group questions were arranged in a logical order and consistently asked in that order during each focus group. The questions were as follows:

1. What attracted you to live in [neighborhood name]?
2. What aspects of the neighborhood work well for you?
3. What are the facilities you visit most often to interact with other people?
4. Why do you like to go to the places you visit most regularly, those you may consider your hangout?
5. What might you participate in if it was available?
6. What types of facilities are most important to have located near your home?

With transcript data in that order, initially these could be sorted by question. Starting with the first question, the transcript data sets for each question were analyzed in turn. These analyses used keyword counts to identify prevalent topics. This was followed by the keyword-in-context analysis to understand underlying meaning and participant-implied connections (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Onwuegbuzie,

Table 2. Neighborhood factors that attract residents.

Keyword Themes	Counts
Quality neighborhood amenities (e.g., walking & biking trails)	12
Convenient access to places they like	12
Beautiful, well-maintained natural environment	9
Special interest clubs	7
Neighborhood services (e.g., lawn care service)	4
Diversity (of fellow residents' ages or housing price ranges)	2
School zone	2
Hometown-like environment	1
Total responses	49

Leech, & Collins, 2012). Accordingly, the following section reports the findings for word counts and keyword-in-context analysis as they applied to each of the six questions asked in each focus group.

Results

This section reports keyword-in-context findings uncovered in the transcript data of the focus group discussions. Divided by question, each topic's data were analyzed independently.

1. Factors attracting older adult residents to the case-study neighborhood

Participants were asked to answer: What attracted you to live in [neighborhood name]? Table 2 shows the keyword count from their answers.

Important factors attracting neighborhood residents included quality amenities such as walking and biking trails, convenient access to places they like to visit, and the beauty of the natural environment. Participants enjoyed the trails because these provide opportunities for social interaction:

That was the thing that stood out to me, that you could go out there and walk and meet people and talk. It was so much fun ...

Since the case-study neighborhood's site was not clear-cut before development, this location offered innumerable mature wooded and attractively designed outdoor areas. Clear-cutting is the removal of all plant life from a site before development. Consequently the trails, offset from the street, were favored because these enabled convenient access to commercial areas and immersion in natural beauty:

And the Village [a commercial area] is accessible on the trail, et cetera. So it was a combination of the Village being a central place where you got to meet people ... plus the ability to walk and enjoy the natural beauty.

Places hosting special interest groups attracted residents initially and now were places these residents visited often:

But two things brought us here. One is The Village. And we belong to a coffee group that meets here ... in the [specific restaurant name] seven days a week.

Not only was the beauty of the natural setting appealing, but residents were drawn to the service amenities offered such as lawn care, meaning their property and adjacent areas were beautifully maintained:

Table 3. Neighborhood aspects that work well.

Keyword Themes	Counts
Diversity	8
Walkability/scale	3
Enjoyable social interactions/nice people	2
Pets	1
Convenient access	1
Total responses	15

And what we like about our neighborhood, they take care of our yard and we don't have to do anything In the back we have the golf course and they take care of that so we have a beautiful garden.

While some long-term residents nostalgically relayed earlier community offerings, they still appeared satisfied:

It was such a community feeling 20 years ago . . . There was a clubhouse that was used for gatherings, like the garden club and the travel club. And there was a community newsletter so you knew what was going on and, of course, a lot of that's disappeared now, but I'm still glad I'm here.

Neighborhood diversity also reportedly attracted these residents. This included diversity such as varying housing types/sizes and commercial spaces attracting diverse-age patrons:

One other thing I'd like to point out I really like is that you can find \$50,000 houses and \$2 million houses. There's such diversity and it really makes it more interesting, I think I love to go out to eat here because you see a mix of all ages and, you know, it's wonderful.

2. Neighborhood aspects that work well

The participants were asked: What aspects of the neighborhood work well for you? **Table 3** shows the keyword count from their answers.

Regarding what aspects work well for them, one frequently occurring theme was the neighborhood's diversity, also discussed earlier as a factor attracting participants to the neighborhood. Age integration was even more prevalent in this second question's discussion. Indicating that diversity opened fresh perspectives and vitalized the community, participants remarked positively on the varying ages, professions, and nationalities of neighborhood residents:

I like having a neighborhood that has multiple ages in it . . . because you get a different perspective if you're only around old people.

These residents reported enjoying convenient access to the places they liked visiting. The walkable environment supported easy access, which promoted opportunities for social interaction. Not only had this aspect attracted them initially, but it also continued to be something they found satisfying:

I think it's the Village Center. The scale of it, I think, is just conducive to meeting people . . .

Table 4. Most often-visited facilities for social interaction.

Keyword Themes	Counts
Nearby food & commercial leisure facilities (e.g., restaurants, country club, exercise centers)	19
Nearby key retail (e.g., grocery, farmer's market)	12
Service facilities (e.g., places of worship)	7
Quality physical amenities (e.g., walking & biking trails)	4
Total responses	42

3. *Facilities residents visit most often to interact with others*

Participating older residents were asked the question: What are the facilities you visit most often to interact with other people? Table 4 shows the keyword count from their answers.

This question addressed which facilities older adults visited to interact socially. Nearby food and leisure venues were important gathering places. Many residents met regularly in local restaurants with friends and acquaintances for informal coffee groups. Participants explained that these gatherings over coffee provided enjoyable conversation and information about community events:

We have a group in the restaurant that meets every Monday for eight years, and it's a great social affair.

Participants also indicated the country club and fitness facilities offered bridge games, book exchanges, and fitness activities, providing interaction opportunities. These activities were seen as a good way to engage and widen social circles. Residents reported developing not just casual acquaintances, but also supportive social ties in some venues:

The people go every day (to the fitness center) ... You talk to people, and we keep track of everyone There's a man that goes every morning, who two weeks ago fell, and nobody had seen him. So I called his wife ... we keep track of each other; people are concerned about how people are.

Key retail (e.g., grocery or farmer's market) and service facilities were other places where residents conversed. The farmer's market was favored because it supported social interaction opportunities with various people. The walking trails, connecting residential and commercial venues, offered benches where residents enjoyed natural areas and interacting with others who were passing by or sitting:

On the paths, I meet a lot of people walking or biking on the path. And you can sit down by the butterfly garden and visit with people there.

Though benches were discussed as important for interaction, a common complaint was benches were too few and far apart. Some expressed concern about walking, tiring, and not having a place to rest. Another shortcoming was the lack of a community center. The neighborhood's original community center, commonly called "Town Hall," was later sold to a church organization and reportedly hosted only a few events for which it was originally used:

Table 5. Most often-visited facilities for social interaction.

Keyword Themes	Counts
Active engagement opportunities (e.g., conversation with friends, dining and group activities, ^a etc.)	23
Friendly & accommodating management/staff	3
Total responses	26

Note. ^aDining and other group activities: dining (9), church (3), watching football games (1), book club (1).

The town hall [the community center], which is now a church, where we play bridge and we do some other things.

The loss of the community center was remarked upon repeatedly throughout focus group sessions. In particular, this topic was further addressed in response to question 6.

4. *Reasons for regularly visiting places*

Participants were asked: Why do you like to go to the places you visit most regularly, those you may consider your hangout? Table 5 shows the keyword counts from their answers.

Most commonly, residents liked visiting specific establishments regularly to actively engage with the surroundings or other individuals. Sometimes activities included eating and drinking, participating in book clubs, or other resident-organized activities. As is common in warm climates, residents enjoyed outdoor dining with friends:

Pastries, the coffee, and the gathering. The fact that you met with people you knew, you sat and chatted and it was a very nice gathering spot.

Other times older adults interacted in venues where conversation was the result of events or activities programmed and hosted by the venue:

Yeah, the country club has a gathering every Friday where they basically cook hamburgers outside, et cetera, and people come and they have various events, they play music, et cetera, and that is a gathering place where a lot of people get together ...

In general, the places that were most favored were friendly, family-owned and managed establishments. Having comfortable, affable acquaintances between staff/management/owners and patrons was valued:

... [Restaurant owner's first name] is very accommodating. I, myself, like pavlova. And so when he cooks fresh pavlova, he actually will call me and tell me, [participant's first name], I just finished making a pavlova. It's ready for you.

5. *Social activities of interest*

Participants were asked the question: What might you participate in if it was available? Table 6 shows the keyword count from their answers.

Most commonly, residents indicated transportation could most increase their social involvement. Since many reported difficulty with nighttime driving due to

Table 6. Activities and services of interest but not available at this time.

Keyword Themes	Counts
Transportation	16
Special interest clubs (e.g., gardening clubs)	5
Planned entertainment events (e.g., music events)	4
Planned educational events	4
Total responses	29

age-related vision loss, the inability to participate in evening activities frustrated residents. This was seen as a substantial limiting factor in their social lives:

I think it would be wonderful if we had some means of transportation to go to the performing arts in the evening, because a lot of people don't like to drive at night, and it would be wonderful if there was a bus or something to take us to it.

Participants also agreed some form of public transportation was desirable to visit spaces within the neighborhood, the city housing the neighborhood, and to “get out of Dodge once in a while.”

Participants expressed concern about their ability (either now or in the future) to easily access key retail and service facilities such as the grocery store, doctor, and pharmacy. Despite walkability being a New Urbanist benefit, participants considered few of this development's subneighborhoods located close enough to commercial areas for older residents to comfortably walk:

We live on two things, pills and food. And those two items are not available [on foot] here.

To illustrate that obtaining essential goods and services was not as simple as transportation alone, one participant referred to a former neighbor who recently moved into a local retirement community:

She's in her 90s. She can go to the grocery store, but she can't carry her groceries. So there's that issue, too.

Also they expressed interest in entertainment or education-driven social events. In particular, live music at local venues was desirable. While interest in entertainment activity was expected, participants also expressed interest in continuing education classes focused on estate planning, computers, or dancing:

Continuing education classes here in the evenings or in afternoons. The kind that are offered at [local community college name].

6. Facility types residents wanted near residence

Participants were asked the question: What types of facilities are most important to have located near your home? [Table 7](#) shows the keyword count from their answers.

Participants expressed their desire in having several key retail and service facilities be a shorter walking distance from their homes. In particular they wanted a fresh food retailer (grocery or farmer's market) and a pharmacy. With advancing

Table 7. Facility types most important to be located near home.

Keyword Themes	Counts
Key retail & service facilities ^a	18
Quality neighborhood physical amenities serving as neutral gathering places ^b	10
Food & commercial leisure venues ^c	3
Total multiple responses	31

Note. ^aGrocery (8), pharmacy (4), medical providers (2), church (1), gas station (1), library (1), post office (1),

^bCommunity center (8), parks (2).

^cFitness (1), golf (1), pool (1).

age, residents stated that it becomes more challenging to access fresh foods, leaving them to rely on less healthy, prepackaged options:

The two basic things that you need as you grow old or older ... Getting fresh food is a challenge. And the other one is getting your prescriptions.

While residents could have prescriptions delivered, this was reportedly unsatisfactory because residents preferred to ask the pharmacist medication questions and considered pharmacy visits as a minor social outing. Being isolated at home with needed items delivered was not appealing to most participants.

These older adults also expressed a desire to have quality neighborhood amenities within walking distance. In line with nature's consistent appeal, residents explained that having attractive, usable parks nearby was important. One participant explained her vision of these:

I think if you could imagine New York Central Park, a small version, a place in the middle that you could get to easily, and not just have to walk, because we can't walk that far, and then spend some time in that area.

Though parks were mentioned, a multipurpose community center was discussed even more. Participants felt they needed a community-owned space to host various group activities (e.g., card games and parties). The development's original community center was no longer available to them:

When we moved in, everybody assumed what we call the meeting hall ... was community owned ... But it's no longer a free community center, and it costs about \$500 for an hour or two up there.

Additionally, residents suggested it would be more desirable to have fitness and sport venues closer to residences. Though the neighborhood already contained approximately three of these, participants indicated that having fitness facilities, a golf course, and pools located even closer was desirable.

Discussion

Making new friends is my favorites! It's so much fun to know their names and play and talk and dance. (Sophia, age 4)

The desire for social interaction is strong and universal. Whether the age of a grandparent or a Boomer's grandchild like Sophia, quality interaction provides

health and well-being benefits, though these health and well-being boosts are greatest for older adults. This is illustrated by numerous studies focused on seniors. For instance, Ybarra et al. (2008) found quality social interaction improved mental sharpness. Another example is a study from Glass et al. (2006) that found a relationship between social interaction and increased longevity as well as decreased depression. These studies indicate healthy aging requires meeting social needs as well as basic physiological needs.

Because of this necessity to go beyond the physical and address social needs, Thomas and Blanchard (2009) argue that aging in place—that is, living independently in one's family home throughout late life—is undesirable because this housing option emphasizes physical accessibility while neglecting to offer ways to develop social relationships. As an alternative to aging in place, Thomas and Blanchard put forth the concept of *aging in community*, which contains the Village housing model. Similar to aging in place, the Village model includes seniors living later life in existing non-age-restricted neighborhood communities. The Village model and aging in place are similar concepts, except the Village model includes an additional programmatic component. That is, residents aging in their existing homes are additionally supported by organizations providing programs and services to help meet both physiological and social needs.

Thomas and Blanchard (2009) are accurate in stating that, historically, the concept of aging in place largely focused on design strategies that provided only physiological support. While this study's researchers agree with Thomas and Blanchard that well-thought-out programming is valuable, from a design research viewpoint, programming solutions become necessary only when an environment's design fails to support desired health, well-being, or behavioral outcomes. Following that notion, programmatic solutions can be used as an added layer of support after neighborhoods and the places within it are intentionally designed to address human needs thoroughly. Rather than taking Thomas and Blanchard's (2009) suggestion and foregoing aging in place entirely, this research contends that attempts should be made to understand and rectify the problems of place that tend to isolate individuals from their community, paving the way for negative health and well-being outcomes.

To follow this argument, it is essential to understand that the built environment influences not only physiological needs, but also higher level needs such as social needs. For instance, Hunt's (1992) study of supportive environments indicated environmental design influenced—either positively or negatively—social needs as well as physiological needs. More recently, research has looked into examining specific factors related to how well social spaces are liked and used by older adults (Campbell, 2014; Campbell, 2015). These studies expanded the design strategies available to support active social lives for seniors aging in place.

Building upon this prior research regarding supporting social needs with environmental design, the research focused on in this article further establishes that design strategies can be tools to provide solutions for successful aging in place. Differing from the Village model that relies on programming as a prosthetic aid to facilitate social interaction, environments that are well designed for aging in place

can facilitate comfortable engagement with others. The environment itself can, and arguably should, provide the appropriate context for seniors to have the option of enjoying a quality social life while also maintaining their independence.

In a contemporary community context, there are obstacles to enjoying a satisfying social life. In large part, this can be linked to the design of American suburban neighborhoods. In the suburban neighborhood model, housing units are spaced far apart from one another and divorce commercial and other community gathering places from residential areas. This tends to isolate individuals rather than bring them together.

Predating suburbia, the traditional neighborhood model offered friendly local pubs and lively cafés within walking distance of residences. As car ownership became commonplace and suburban developments increased in number, there was a corresponding decrease in the availability of lively gathering places. In light of this, research indicates that the loss of welcoming neighborhood gathering places left a hole in the fabric of suburban American social life for people of all ages (Oldenburg, 1999). Oldenburg's work built a strong case for creating welcoming establishments that foster community and supportive relationships. Oldenburg coined these increasingly rare gathering spots as "third places." Also viewing suburban neighborhood design as the culprit for the deterioration of community life, Oldenburg studied and supported reestablishment of authentic third places within communities. Despite this, the shortage of third places and a missing sense of connectedness and community still remain.

In response to suburbia's shortcomings, the New Urbanist neighborhood model evolved. New Urbanism strived to create high-density, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly, fully age-integrated neighborhoods. New Urbanist design directives promote locating commercial areas within a 10-minute walk of residences. This puts commercial and leisure services back within residents' daily path of travel, thus enabling spontaneous social stops in commercial establishments, as were routine in traditional neighborhood life.

With advancing age, a neighborhood's walkability is increasingly important because decreased visual acuity, a common age-related change, often limits and sometimes prohibits having driving privileges. Regardless of eyesight quality, seniors still need groceries, medications, and other essentials. Accordingly, having the option to obtain necessities on foot is often critical to maintaining independence. The New Urbanist neighborhood model, with design guidelines including locating commercial establishments within a 10-minute walk of residences, is intended to be more walkable than the suburban development model. Even so, there is room for interpretation regarding what distance creates a 10-minute walk. Other age-related physiological changes, such as limited mobility, may impact what distances can be traveled on foot in 10 minutes. Thus, older residents in New Urbanist neighborhoods frequently require much more than 10 minutes to reach commercial areas. As the distance to commercial venues becomes increasingly difficult to negotiate, seniors make fewer trips outside the home. This hinders community engagement and indicates a need for a more ageless New Urbanist neighborhood model.



Figure 1. The Ageless New Urbanism (ANU) Framework showing categories identified as helping attract and maintain older adult satisfaction with neighborhoods and neighborhood social spaces.

While New Urbanist communities are arguably the best noninstitutional, mainstream housing option to suit older adults, New Urbanist neighborhoods and their social centers need to be reconsidered to successfully meet older adults' changing needs. To do that, we must first understand what New Urbanist neighborhood and social space design characteristics are important in attracting and supporting older residents aging in place.

To accomplish that and work toward developing a more age-friendly New Urbanist community design model, a theoretical framework is needed. With this in mind, we proposed the Ageless New Urbanism framework to guide this investigation (See Figure 1). To shape this model, this study utilized input from four focus groups of residents aged 65+ from the New Urbanist case-study community. From the focus group data, attributes that attracted and helped maintain older adults' satisfaction with the neighborhood and its social spaces were identified with keyword counts, followed by keyword-in-context analysis. The Ageless New Urbanism framework applies to communities on a larger scale—the neighborhood level—and a more micro-scale—the social space level. From these data, this study identified factors that help attract and maintain older adult social life satisfaction. Structuring the framework at both levels, these identified factors were organized into four categories: location factors, social factors, design factors, and programmatic factors.

Location factors

Within the location factor, category participants reported several location-related themes important in attracting and contributing to their ongoing satisfaction with their New Urbanist community. Regarding the neighborhood's site location, its perceived convenience was discussed as significant. For instance, participants viewed their neighborhood's proximity to and incorporation of food and leisure venues, key retail establishments, and other places they liked to visit regularly as critical location-related factors.

Also related to location, yet more unexpected, the neighborhood's public school zoning was also important to participants. The reasoning given was quality schools

attracted quality neighborhood residents, helped maintain property values, and were convenient when helping with local grandchildren's child care.

Reportedly, public bus service for this neighborhood could be accessed only on the neighborhood's outermost edge and was seen as inadequate. Since many participants' vision prohibited nighttime driving, the unavailability of public transportation often excluded these residents from participating in evening activities. Even without suitable public transportation and ride-sharing programs, this characteristic did not prevent these residents from choosing to live in this neighborhood. Even so, participants anticipated this obstacle impacting their long-term ability to age in place.

It is important to note here, though, that public transportation does not resolve all issues related to obtaining needed goods and services. For instance, even with robust public transportation systems, a resident with arthritic hands might be unable to carry groceries once purchased. As a result, when identifying aging-in-place solutions, each step required to complete essential tasks must be considered, potential challenges identified, and then appropriate solutions found.

The New Urbanist neighborhood focused on in this study contained two commercial/mixed-use areas, viewed positively overall by participants. Most participants favored the village-style commercial area that offered more social engagement opportunities compared to the strip mall-style commercial area known as Market Square. Participants considered the convenient proximity of these commercial areas as one of the location-related characteristics attracting them to the area and supporting their continued satisfaction. In particular, residents preferred having spaces located within walking distance from home. This is consistent with related research by Campbell (2014), which indicated social spaces were better liked and used when they were in close proximity to residences and located along resident daily paths of travel.

Social factors

In addition to location factors, social factors were identified as important in attracting seniors and supporting the ability of residents to age in place. Within the group of social factors, the neighborhood's resident diversity was attractive to participants because they felt a mixed-age environment created a refreshing social atmosphere. Also, some participants valued the neighborhood being pet-friendly, meaning cafés and restaurants welcomed pets in outdoor seating areas. Pet-owning residents felt pet-friendly places gave them a destination to visit while walking pets. Additionally, participants viewed pets as a valuable social catalyst, enabling natural conversation at restaurants and during neighborhood walks. This aligns with Whyte's (1980) seminal research on the social life of urban plazas that indicated the presence of a noteworthy element, such as a sculpture, sparked conversation.

Related to this in neighborhood venues, residents tended to like and want other social catalysts as well. These catalysts, called active engagement opportunities, provide more socially comfortable ways to engage with the environment or with

others. Small, informally planned events such as meeting regularly in “coffee groups” was another active engagement opportunity. While some groups met daily and others weekly at a local bistro, the purpose was simply to chat over coffee and perhaps a muffin or dessert. With food and drink serving as an active engagement opportunity, these gave residents a reason to be there and a ready group with whom to share conversation. This finding is consistent with Campbell’s (2014) research findings in a retirement community context indicating social spaces were better liked and used when active engagement opportunities were present.

Design factors

Beyond that, design factors were the third consideration for the neighborhood and its social spaces. While active engagement opportunities were considered a social factor, active engagement opportunities could be more limited without facilities designed flexibly to accommodate various purposes and group sizes. Consequently, participants indicated multipurpose spaces were favored because they enabled residents to engage in a wider variety of activity options.

Before social needs may be met, though, residents’ basic needs must first be addressed. This was why participants preferred venues with designs addressing their physiological needs. For instance, facilities with poorly designed acoustical controls resulted in noise levels making conversation difficult or impossible for some individuals. Also, mobility-impaired residents found some building entrances difficult to maneuver. Those residents preferred to avoid these commercial entries rather than struggle through, particularly when other patrons were likely to witness their difficulty. This is in line with Hunt’s (1992) research indicating physiological needs (as well as social needs) must be addressed for environments to support users’ needs and capabilities.

Other important design considerations included accommodating conversation and activities with more private areas within commercial spaces and having a public neutral gathering place to accommodate conversation and activities. With that, another important design factor was quality physical amenities in the neighborhood, particularly the scenic walking and biking trails. In addition to exercise use, walking and biking trails were also seen as a key social venue and, often, where they most often interacted socially. However, one shortcoming discussed was a shortage of benches. This was problematic because age-related limitations dictated residents rest at shorter intervals than current distances between benches facilitated. Several residents expressed concern they might be walking and become stranded with no places nearby to sit and rest.

This point regarding travel distances within the neighborhood was further strengthened by discussion about walking distances to various destinations these residents enjoyed visiting. Residents living closer to commercial areas reported enjoying their proximity but questioned whether they could indefinitely travel that distance on foot, implying current distances were stretching their abilities. Another

factor residents valued was the diversity in housing type/size which added visual interest to their experience of living in the community.

Programmatic factors

Beyond these factors, the fourth factor group, programmatic factors, provides another layer of support for neighborhood and social space designs. Programmatic factors are those aspects influenced by management decisions such as organization-planned events, and an organization's affecting patron behaviors. These rules might include allowing patrons to reserve tables for card games, for patrons to bring their own wine/alcohol into an establishment that does not sell it, or the like. Based on focus group findings, these also influenced participants' attraction to and continued use of the neighborhood and its social spaces. At the neighborhood level, housing-size diversity mentioned earlier related directly to housing price ranges. During planning, neighborhood developers made decisions regarding housing pricing for the development, which influenced the neighborhood residents from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. This is evidenced in the neighborhood's home values ranging from well under \$100,000 to over \$1,000,000, as well as in the wide variety of rental listings, with monthly rents ranging from \$800 to \$3,000 as of this article's writing. By offering desirable housing options to young people starting out as well as to wealthy, established individuals, this programmatic factor promoted neighborhood diversity. This is in line with Hunt and Ross's (1990) finding that upkeep was essential in attracting and maintaining seniors' housing satisfaction; participants valued how consistently well-maintained management kept the neighborhood.

Also related to management decisions, well-organized neighborhood social events were discussed as important. This community hosted many events such as a weekly farmer's market, holiday-themed festivals, and others. As these provided a lively atmosphere and supported the sense of community, residents viewed these events positively.

At the social space level, there were several key programmatic factors. In addition to engaging with neighborhood community events, commercial establishments offered their own programmed events including activities such as a pub's weekly trivia night and a bistro's English tea. While participants enjoyed current offerings, they suggested that other entertainment events and the addition of educational events would encourage further space usage.

Not only were management decisions regarding programmed events influential, venues with affable and accommodating management/staff were also significant. Among favored spaces were those with friendly owners and staff who knew many customers' names and amiably accommodated resident-planned activities—a personal touch participants valued highly. Another important programmatic factor was food/service affordability. For instance, participants reported a specific local restaurant lost their patronage because it had increased the price of coffee. Therefore, these groups preferred one particular café for offering coffee at a better price.

Conclusion

With these influential factors identified, design practitioners may use this information to guide alterations to existing neighborhood and social space designs to better support the social needs of individuals wishing to age in place. From a research standpoint, these findings open discussion of factors playing a role in supporting healthy aging in place. Additionally, this presents opportunities for further study such as closely examining, comparing, and prioritizing these factors for optimal usefulness. Also, additional empirical studies are needed to further examine potential cultural differences in residential areas between different states or regions.

By striving to resolve this problem of place design that discourages social engagement for older adults living in mainstream neighborhood contexts, we are working with rather than fighting against the conviction held by over 90% of Americans who seek to age in place (Oswald, Jopp, Rott, & Wahl, 2011). Rather than neglecting aging in place, attention could and, as this article argues, should be turned toward adapting existing communities as well as using this Ageless New Urbanist framework to guide the planning of entirely new, ageless neighborhoods. This suggests that mainstream communities and the urban planners, architects, interior designers, and landscape architects who shape and adapt them will need to play an active role in meeting physiological and social needs when designing housing for the aging population.

Since the need for social interaction is strong and universal, environments designed to support relationships are essential in creating healthy aging in any housing context. This study's findings suggest supportive neighborhood and social space design attributes. When designers integrate these characteristics these New Urbanist neighborhoods become more ageless by better supporting seniors' interaction needs for those preferring to age in place. Through in-depth focus group interviews, within the Ageless New Urbanism framework this study identified four attribute domains supporting interaction: *location*, *social*, *design*, and *programmatic factors*. By providing main themes for consideration in design and development, these domains strengthen support for Ageless New Urbanism neighborhood social space design.

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