Duany and Plater-Zyberk begin their piece with the following:

"There have been only two types of urbanism in North America:
The neighborhood pattern,
which was the model from the settlements
to the middle of this century,
and the suburban pattern, which has been the model since."

Before commenting on Duany's and Zyberk's specific "neighborhood" design suggestions let me comment on the comparative premise they use to make their points. To begin with the "two types of urbanism in North America" (since the industrial revolution) were not the "neighborhood pattern" versus the "suburban pattern." It was the centralized city pattern of the late 19th and early 20th century and the suburban pattern that followed it. The "neighborhood pattern," as they call it, occurred in both. Even using the overly restrictive criteria they use in defining a neighborhood a careful comparison of the more urbanized central cities versus their suburbs will not support their premise that neighborhoods occur more often in one than the other. And to assert that suburbia is devoid of neighborhoods is absurd.

In reviewing their paper on "neighborhoods and suburbs" I've, for reasons explained above, chosen to ignore the "and suburbs" and will comment on their criteria for creating 'neighborhoods.'

Duany and his wife Plater-Zyberk have characterized their planning as neo(new)-traditional. Their claim is that they are creating the charm and neighborliness of the small towns of our pedestrian past while preserving the modern day conveniences of today. The market appeal of their claim is obvious. Particularly when applied within the vast suburban fringes of large metropolitan regions. This movie set image of small town, country store and neighbors sipping lemonade and exchanging daily gossip while sitting on their respective porch swings plays to the nostalgia many (maybe most) have for the past. A past, at least, as Ozzie and Harriet portrayed it.

The Ozzie and Harriet image of neighborhood and home is a powerful and therefore salable image. So salable that home builders have been using it for years. For those old enough to recall during the late 50's and early 60's they built what we architects derogatorily called "Cinderella homes." The styling of the builders house was geared to an audience that saw home and neighborhood as the place they grew up in. Or their grandparents. Or most likely what the popularized media and family movies portrayed it to be. The public wanted, demanded, was for their new home to look like Ozzie and Harriet's bungalow. We do the same today. The only difference is that currently builders in our area have resurrected the Spanish/mission period of our past and the mission tile business has boomed. Duany's porches are an attempt to provide the same emotional response from the buying public as the fake shutters did in the 60's.

Will Duany's porches produce a more neighborly neighborhood? That question reminds me of a study a friend (now professor at UCI) of mine conducted in the mid-sixties. Her question was: Are those who live within a cul-de-sac more neighborly than those who don't? Rather than assert they were as Duany appears to be doing she sought to find out. The result of her inquiries of those who lived in cul-de-sacs and those who didn't was: those who lived in cul-de-sacs “thought” theirs was a more neighborly environment. But when pressed for examples, sharing, names of neighbors, etc. my friend found they knew neighbors no better than those who did not live on a cul-de-sac. But to a builder attempting to sell houses the fact that most potential buyers believed cul-de-sacs are more neighborly is enough for them to build as many as possible. I suspect that the same will be true for Duany’s porch houses. They just look like they should be neighbor friendlier. As with my friends cul-de-sac study, I doubt that that presumption will prove to become a reality. But if the public thinks otherwise builders will build as many porch houses as the market will bear.

The question is; Is the “neo-traditionalism” they are suggesting just another marketing slogan applied to an old marketing ploy or an appropriate and workable blending of past environments and present realities? While I suspect it’s a little bit of both, I hope that it along with the other new buzz words “new urbanism and “new suburbanism,” that some architects, urban planners and academia use to
distinguish their work from their competitors, will energize the profession to find ways to improve what they have too long dismissed as unworthy of their talents. Namely suburbia. Or outer cities. Or what ever they wish to call the places where the vast majority of Americans have chosen to live and work.

The public made its decision over 60 years ago. It’s about time our profession stopped criticizing where hundreds of millions of people have chosen to live and started to contribute to the daunting task of reconciling the irreversible changes in modes of travel, communication, economic diversification, dual working households, shopping and entertainment that characterize the reality of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century to the instinctively and understandable desires of man to seek a better life for himself and his/her family.

In most respects what the home buyer of today seeks with respect to jobs, a safe environment, good schools, recreation, entertainment and cultural outlets, convenient shopping, churches and to live among friends and colleges is exactly the same as the home buyer sought 100 years ago. And the family of today and yesterday wants all that in a nice physical environment that they are proud to invite their friends to. And, we know from past and current experience, that they prefer to live in an immediate community that either by its size, separation, design or communality of facilities they can both visually and physically define as theirs. For that reason, neo-traditionalism (new-traditionalism) is an appropriate description. A reconciliation of the traditional values, wants and needs of our past with the realities of the present.

But Duany has gone beyond theorizing and philosophizing about the need to reconcile the eternal wants and needs of man with the realities of the present. He has even gone beyond drawing up idealistic plans and Vitruvius like rules of reconciliation. At least one of his communities has existed long enough to be evaluated against his original theories. That community is a small resort community called Seaside, located on the Florida coast.

Duany takes justifiable pride in “the fact that the town has achieved the desired strong sense of community while closely following its intended physical plan.” Visually Seaside has a sense of unity that its architecture provides. But being only 80 acres in size, located on the coast with an ocean on one side and undeveloped scrub land on the other three sides it’s difficult to imagine this subdivision size development visually appearing as anything other than the isolated community it is. Nicely designed. Well planned. But there are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of nicely designed second home small resort communities up and down the two coasts of the United States and on the islands of Hawaii to which it should rightly be compared.

But if Seaside is to be held up as an example of a successful year round community worthy of emulation we need know more. We need to know whether it satisfies even the most basic of definitions for a community. Namely, is it a place where its residents “have common ties or interest, share common interests and ideas.” Or is this a community where few live and most visit, rent out, invest in. Do the owners involve themselves in the school system and city government (if there is any.) What lessons does it provide those who are struggling to create communities within the vast molasses of our metropolitan regional cities? Not much if anything.

My initial reaction to the exaggerated rhetoric Duany uses in describing his ideas was to dismiss him in the same way we usually dismiss those professionals who continue to rail against “suburbia” as though it was created over the objections of those who live there. But on second thought I find myself pleased that he and other like minded have entered the fray. They aren’t just bashing. They are proposing ideas and in some cases subjecting those ideas to the real test of the market place.

Until Duany’s project has reached sufficient maturity to be resident tested my reaction is to ignore their exaggerated claims. Give them time to experiment like the rest of us. In the meanwhile, if their invented terms like “neo-traditionism” and “new-urbanism” provides the intellectual cover for more serious work in this important field by those professionals and schools that have ignored it too long we and society may yet benefit from their efforts. As for Duany’s explicit vitruvian rules for designing and creating “Neighborhoods and Suburbs” their vagueness allows one to agree or disagree depending upon ones predisposition.

What Duany and other interested professionals and scholars need to do now is get out into the suburban world that has been built over the past 40 years. Test their theories on real living examples. There isn’t a theory or idea that Duany suggested that hasn’t been tried. We are beyond the need for rigid
rules and theories. What we need is a Kevin Lynch like study combined with social inquires where residents are asked to talk about and define their neighborhood. What to them makes it a neighborhood. We’ve done a fair amount of that questioning ourselves over the years and the responses have been responsible for the many changes we’ve made in the design of one village from another.

As for the specific "rules" suggested by Duany in commenting on them I’ve drawn upon our experience here on The Irvine Ranch and particularly the lessons we’ve learned from 45 years of experimentation.

**Duany Rule 1:** "Neighborhoods are urbanized areas containing a balance of human activity: a variety of housing, adequate shopping, a range of workplaces, and the facilities for elementary education. These are integrated to other neighborhoods by a network of small streets. Neighborhoods aggregate to form towns and cities, while a single neighborhood standing free in the landscape is a village."

What Duany defines as a neighborhood we call a village which he defines as, “a single neighborhood standing free in the landscape.” I believe his definitions blurs the important distinction between the two. The inference is that the only difference between a neighborhood and a village is the latter stands “free in the landscape” and the former doesn’t. Early on in our planning we also struggled with what constituted a neighborhood. How big. How diversified. Should each have a school. A shopping center. A park. A church. And on and on.

Planning text of the time (early ‘60’s) often defined a neighborhood as the area serving an elementary school. We, as does Duany, wanted our neighborhoods to contain “a balance of human activity” but we were also struck by the fact that when many families were asked to define their own neighborhood they described something much more intimate in scale. Their street. Their next door neighbor. The tot lot up the street. To them neighborhood was much smaller in scale than would accommodate a school, shopping, churches and a park large enough to accommodate little league baseball and competitive soccer. Of course we could have called one the local neighborhood and the latter just the neighborhood. But we were also simultaneously planning a number of areas on the ranch and by then also convinced that our larger “neighborhoods” would benefit from Lynch’s edges and entrances. Defining entrances was easy. It was creating strong, visible edges that became the challenge.

Frankly it wasn’t just Lynch’s work that convinced us of the need to define our neighborhoods. Part of the Irvine Ranch is within the city of Newport Beach and Newport is known for its distinctive communities. The most obvious of which were its islands, Balboa, Harbor and Lido, and the Balboa Peninsula. And in circulating around Newport I quickly learned their respective residents were also distinctive in family composition and life style. Lido island was populated by young and old but primarily families with no commercial or civic facilities. While Balboa island and the Balboa Peninsula were a mixture of shops, restaurants, civic facilities, second homes and primary residents. As a result Lido island’s population remained stable the year round while the two Balboa’s population doubled in the summer and changed from week to week (as I suspect does Seaside.)

The other characteristic I observed was that within each there were smaller neighborhoods distinguished by different family types (singles versus family), densities, architectural character and uses. But despite all these differences what impressed me was that despite their differences in size, use and character their respective permanent residents participated in the political and social affairs of the entire city.

For those of us charged with converting an area two and one-half times the size of San Francisco and struggling with academic definitions of neighborhoods and cities while desiring to introduce diversity without sacrificing local identity and unity Newport’s islands were the best live case study we could ever have hoped for. What we concluded and what became the basic tenet of our planning was we wanted to create the distinctiveness, diversity (where possible) and identity of Newport’s islands only we had to produce them without the advantages of surrounding water. In fact the Irvine Ranch was for the most part barren without natural foliage.

So we discarded the planning text book’s definitions of neighborhood and settled on our own. The neighborhood was our smallest unit. It was to be intimate in size and units similar in scale, density and size. The public spaces were mostly small tot lots within eye distance of the mothers homes or recreation facilities within eye distance of the none family neighborhoods. And many neighborhoods would evolve into a Village, our substitute for the larger neighborhood.
And with that clear distinction between neighborhood and village we were free to provide the intimacy and non diversity of uses and housing types clustered within the diversity of the entire village of which the neighborhoods were clearly a part. But since we sought to physically define our Villages as Newport’s islands were naturally defined we of necessity chose mostly man made elements to define their edges. Thus the sizes of Villages vary greatly as the natural topography, flood control channels and arterial roads and freeways define them. We then reinforced the found edges with mounding and landscaping. And finally we physically tied each Village to the other by a road and bicycle system and socially tied them together by creating the political and school systems of Irvine or annexing them to an adjacent existing city.

In reflecting, then, on Duany’s Rule #1 defining a neighborhood my reaction is much like it was when I first turned to the planning text books in the early sixties. Interesting but not much help.

**BUILDING CODES**

Duany believes codes should “control the size and disposition of buildings” without specifying “their function” thus “permitting the function of the buildings to vary initially and to change over time.” He apparently believes controlling functions (uses) of buildings is a suburban oriented anti-mixed use and therefore anti-neighborhood policy. Frankly he’s dead wrong. Use zoning began in the cities and was adopted by the suburbs. As the concerns over the monotony of suburbs took hold in the sixties it was there that mixed use zoning and flexible building standards were first introduced.

I, too, am in favor of more mixed use zoning but except in rare and isolated situations opposed to eliminating use controls and leaving that to be controlled by “size and disposition of buildings” on the site. What he, and many urban designers want is a code that would allow a store or bar to be built next to a single family house providing they fit properly on the lot. How this would enhance a neighborhood is beyond me. But we needn’t worry. The “folks” will never let that happen. That is once someone converts their house to a use that their neighbor clearly finds offensive.

**SHOPPING**

Duany advocates commercial areas of neighborhoods be “seamlessly integrated with housing, providing residents a gradient of choice; to live adjacent, close, or distant from the activities of the center.” He claims “shopping centers of suburban communities are physically isolated from the adjacent housing …forcing all residents, even the most proximate, to drive.”

Depending upon what he means by “seamlessly integrated,” I think I agree. For the most part that’s what we’ve been doing in Irvine for years. Despite that fact, however, few walk to the store. Regardless of whether they walk or drive to the supermarket it is there that much neighborhood social interchanging goes on. As for his comments about suburban shopping centers being “physically isolated from adjacent housing” my only comment is that may be true in some cases and not true in most.

Although Duany doesn’t specifically mention it another plea I often hear is for smaller convenience stores scattered throughout the neighborhoods suggesting the residents will now walk rather than drive to do their daily shopping and engage in more social intercourse. My experience is that there is far less social exchanges between residents when shopping at smaller 7/11 type neighborhood stores than supermarkets. The residents spend more time at the larger stores and use the 7/11 store for the forgotten quart of milk or a pack of cigarettes.

**BUSINESS**

He claims in suburbia that businesses “are in office parks segregated from shops and restaurants” and he advocates neighborhood businesses be “integrated” within the neighborhood “with shops below.”

First of all businesses that go into office parks are not neighborhood businesses. Business parks consist of companies like Hewlett Packard, Microsoft, etc. and draw their specialized employees from miles around. If they were injected into residential neighborhoods they bring unwanted traffic onto residential streets. I agree, however, that so called office parks should have restaurants and other services within them to avoid the need for employees to drive outside the parks for lunch and other needed services. Irvine’s business parks have restaurants, service outlets and in the case of Spectrum a large entertainment complex.

As for allowing neighborhood businesses into neighborhood shopping centers we, and most suburban shopping centers do the same. There are even many examples of two story centers with stores on the ground floor and businesses on the second floor. Unfortunately, our twenty five years of experience with such two story centers indicate the second floor businesses do not do as well as when they are located in their own building and not in conflict with commercial stores.
OPEN SPACE
I agree with Duany’s definition of open space as “squares or parks which are of specific use to the
community and if possible should be located in the fronts of buildings (rather than behind) where they are
accessible to the public.” Contrary to his suggestion, however, most parks in suburbia, including all of
ours, are as he advocates.

PUBLIC SPACE
Duany claims suburban public space “is occupied sporadically, usually during specifically
organized activities such as festivals” and neighborhood public space should be “occupied …constantly
by virtue of it connection to daily activity.” In fact, what he advocates is what we and most suburban
areas do. For the most part most public spaces in suburbia are in the form of parks and they are integrated
throughout the community

HOUSING
Duany advocates housing types (different densities) not be “segregated (except by streets) with
shared public space, and common taxation for municipal services.” He asserts the opposite is true in
suburbia.

Early in the post war suburban movement there was little mix of density types leading to large
enclaves of either apartments or single family subdivisions. However, over the past thirty years there has
been a tremendous number of mixed density and type residential developments built in the suburbs. In
Irvine we have mixed housing types in virtually all of our villages in the manner he suggests and have
been doing it for over thirty years. Again this is not a suburban versus neighborhood issue. The
challenge is how best to make that mix while preserving unity in smaller neighborhoods.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING
Duany correctly argues against creating “large clusters” of subsidized housing “separated from
market rate housing. His solution is to produce “rental apartments at the rear yards of middle-income
houses”, thus, providing “economic integration” and “supplemental income” for the owners of the
property.

I agree we need to avoid creating ghettos of government subsidized low income families. His idea
of building units in someone’s back yard will do little to deal with the need for such housing. First of all,
unless the back yard units are rent controlled they will be subject to the same market pressures as if they
were on the front of the lot. And if subsidized they will quickly become stigmatized as the place where
those “poor folks” live. Nothing wrong with building units in one’s back yard but it’s not a solution to
affordable housing.

For years what we have done in Irvine is to build middle-class apartment complexes within our
villages so they become part of the social and recreational structure of the village. Then in many of these
complexes a percentage (usually 25%) of the units are part of a government subsidized rental program.
However, the 25% are not fixed as to location or type. Our goal is never to identify a unit or family as
subsidized. We have also integrated for-sale housing within one of our villages (Woodbridge) which was
part of a government subsidized low income program. Again the units are visually indistinguishable from
the non-subsidized units.

CIVIC BUILDINGS
Duany argues for the placement of Civic buildings in “honorific locations” such as at squares or at
the termination of street vistas.

Actually this is an urban design objective that many of us have followed. Again the objective has
nothing to do with suburbia. It has to do with the resources and interest the civic groups have in
purchasing such locations. We have provided substantial subsidies in the purchase of such sites as an
incentive for the public to locate their buildings in accordance with our urban designs.

STREET LAYOUT
Duany describes his preference as “each street trajectory retains its cardinal orientation” which, I
assume, is a code phrase for a grid-iron layout. He argues against “aggressively curvilinear” street lay
outs.

I too am opposed to “aggressively curvilinear” street lay outs. But I am also opposed to too rigid
adherence to any particular layout pattern. The grid iron street pattern works in many situations. But
other patterns are appropriate in other situations.

GARAGES
Duany dislikes the street that is dominated by garage doors. So do I. That is a particular problem
with narrow lots. However, his solution is alleys “leaving the facades for socially interactive elements
such as windows, porches, and stoops facing the street.”
Indeed, alleys do solve the garage domination of the street. But at a price. The addition of alleys introduces additional street surfacing (the alley), makes the back yard as the primary entrance for the family since the majority of time they arrive or leave via a car and finally introduces a security problem at the rear of all houses. Alleys are useful in some but rare situations. They are not a viable solution to the garage door domination problem.

**BUILDING ARTICULATION**
Duany advocates “modest articulation” of the facade and that “all buildings are aligned, creating a wall that defines a sense of place.”

What Duany is describing is the conflict between urban designers versus home owners view of the role of the facade of a house. Designers want facades to act as “walls” creating street “spaces” while home owners want their facades to express their individuality and tastes. I agree the streetscape needs to contribute to the street space but we also need to respect the need and importance of satisfying the home owners need to say, “isn’t my house lovely” rather than only being able to say “aren’t all these houses lovely.”

**FACADES**
Duany merely repeats his argument for “simplifying” front facades and suggest that it is in one’s back yard that one can express their individuality.

The entire argument seems to contradicts his alley argument which he justifies as a way to free “the facades for socially interactive elements.” It is our experience that home owners primarily express their individuality within the neighborhood through their front facades and yards.

**CURB RADIUS (CORNERS)**
Duany wants the typical rounded curb radius to be reduced to the point where it would require “cars to stop before turning.”

He’s dreaming. All his suggestion will produce is damaged tires.

**TRAFFIC**
Duany suggest narrower local and collector streets as a way to “force cars down to speeds which are compatible with residential use.

This is an old and on going argument between urban designers and traffic engineers. If we, urban designers, had some proof that narrower streets does in fact reduce speed then we might be able to convince the city fathers to change. Since, so far, we haven’t produced credible evidence (only opinions like Duany’s) we haven’t had much impact on the subject. In very rural areas with large lots this has worked since off street parking is not as necessary. But as housing densities and the number of cars per household have increased the streets now are often looking like parking lots. In such situations narrowing streets below the 36 feet necessary to allow one car in each direction and parking on both sides will produce a less rather than a more attractive street scene. Balboa island is a prime example of what narrower streets and lots with more cars. Few would describe Balboa’s neighborhood street scenes as pleasant.

**URBAN FABRIC**
Duany argues for “neighborhood boulevards” with “accommodations for traffic, parking, trees, and sidewalks, creating habitable public spaces that weave the buildings into an urban fabric.”

Certainly some “neighborhood boulevards” should have all the elements he mentions. Actually that is exactly what we’ve done with the major collectors streets in the village of Woodbridge. On-the-other-hand Culver and Jeffery avenues fit some of the description of what he dislikes in that they are suburban arterials primarily devoted to connecting our villages to regional freeways and bus and train depots. As such because of auto created noise and safety residents prefer to turn their back on such heavily traveled roads. His argument, most likely, will be against such higher speed connectors but he will come out on the losing end of that argument as long as the automobile dominates.

**INTERSECTIONS**
Duany argues for the location of parks and “other marketable building sites” at “major neighborhood intersections.”

Since gas stations stopped locating on every major intersections there are less uses that seek such locations. My choice is to locate uses where they are most appropriate and I believe local parks, for instance, are best located away from major intersections. Duany’s suggestions would make better sense if they weren’t so absolute. What I assume he is looking for in this category is for ways to make the suburban fabric more interesting and there I agree with him. But this is best done on a selective rather than formula basis.

**SUMMARY**
I have two reactions to both Duany’s words and his work. On the one hand I’m pleased that someone of his and his wife’s obvious talent and passion has joined the battle to improve the quality of our suburban communities. Having said that I found little in either his writings or work from which we could learn. But that should be understandable since we’ve been struggling out in the vineyards for over 45 years. And our work has benefited from market and community input against which our theories are continually being tested.

With time and some feed back his words will mellow and work improve. That is if he listens to the comments of those who live within his communities. Hopefully, he will.