

Study examines activity and neighborhood patterns

A \$750,000 research project is under way that will evaluate how traditional neighborhoods impact walking patterns, automobile use, and quality of life at locations nationwide. Three new urban communities will be studied: New Town at St. Charles, Missouri; Stapleton in Denver; and Atlantic Station in Atlanta. Data collection has begun at New Town, and soon will start at Stapleton, Ross Brownson, a professor with the St. Louis University School of Public Health and principal investigator on the project, told *New Urban News*. Historic traditional neighborhoods in Atlanta, San Diego, St. Louis, and Sacramento will also be studied; the locations in these cities are currently being selected.

Activity levels, behavior, and percep-

tions of individuals and families will be studied both prior to and after moving to traditional neighborhoods, Brownson notes. The study could break new ground, especially as it pertains to the impact of New Urbanism.

FIRST OF ITS KIND

"These are the first large-scale studies in the US to look at the effect of moving into a community that is structurally designed to encourage walking and biking," said Brownson. "We know that these new communities are designed to make it easier for people to walk or bike to their destinations. What we don't know is whether the layout of community sidewalks and trails actually stimulates a more active lifestyle."

Funding for the research came from the Centers for Disease Control, which provided a 3-year, \$400,000 grant, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, which provided a 1-year, \$350,000 grant. Researchers may have initial data after one year, Brownson says. The team will likely apply for a larger, multiyear grant for the National Institutes of Health after the first year.

Brownson is working with principal investigators Christine Hoehner of St. Louis University, Lawrence Frank of Lawrence Frank and Company, Susan Handy at the University of California at Davis, Jim Hill at University of Colorado, and Sherry Ryan at the San Diego State University. ♦

When a town has to fight for TOD

Even in the hinterland, communities are becoming enthusiastic about placing compact, mixed-use development around their train stations. In Dover, New York, a Dutchess County town of 8,900, local officials spent the past several years laying the groundwork for a mixed-use village they would like to see around a station that already offers commuter service into Grand Central Station in Manhattan, 70 miles to the south.

Dover's Wingdale station sits in the middle of the defunct Harlem Valley Psychiatric Center, an 80-building, 850-acre mental hospital campus that had been the town's economic engine until it was closed by the state in 1994. Joel Russell, a new urbanist planning consultant, helped the town plan for redevelopment that would concentrate retail, office, service commercial, and some of the housing within walking distance of the station. Development close to the Metro North line would be balanced by preservation of natural areas farther away, including the ecologically significant Great Swamp, second-largest wetland in the state.

SPRAWL PROPOSED

The town stipulated in its zoning that at least 50 percent of the floor space of the project must be nonresidential. "They want it done in a mixed-use fabric that preserves many of the older historic buildings," Russell notes. However, the Benjamin Companies, a Long Island-based developer that paid \$3.9 million for the former psychiatric campus in 2003, submitted a redevelopment plan that some local officials considered "a pattern for sprawl," with "little cul-de-sac roads all over the site," according to *The New York Times*.

To resolve the issue, Benjamin Companies, at the town's insistence, later hired a new urbanist firm, Torti Gallas &

Partners, to advise on how to develop the property. "The town would like to have almost all of the development within a 10-minute walk," Erik Aulestia, principal in charge for Torti Gallas, told *New Urban News*.

Benjamin Companies has continued to insist there isn't enough demand to support the commercial development and the higher-density housing that the town would like to see near the station. Meanwhile, the developer is asking to construct 1,400 housing units, many of them in scattered in clusters of small lots on previously undisturbed portions of the property, not within walking distance of the station. As a result, the developer and the town remained at loggerheads recently.

Greater New York's population is forecast to grow by three to four million in the next 25 years, a trend that smart-growth proponents say calls for compact, pedestrian-oriented development. "This is an ideal site for a new urbanist TOD," Russell says. "If the developer wanted to do this kind of project at the outset, it would likely be under construction by now with the full support of the Town." Says Aulestia: "My guess is that as municipalities are demanding better design these issues will come up more and more." ♦

Louisiana

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observers as nonsensical, since the city is supposed to be protected from flooding; that's the purpose of the levee system — which needs to be improved.

Louisiana Speaks presents the upgrading of planning in southern Louisiana as possibly the beginning of better planning statewide. Thomas said her experiences around the state reinforce that view. "We took our road show to northern Louisiana," she noted, "and they were very receptive." Louisiana Speaks, Thomas suggested, may end up being the first phase of a statewide plan. The plan is at www.louisianaspeaks.org. ♦