

Neighborhood Centers as “Third Places”.

NEIGHBORHOOD THIRD PLACES.

Ray Oldenburg, see sidebar, effectively describes gathering spots that serve as “third places”; places where people relax and commune; the “in-between” places, not work, not home. His idea extends from small town cafés and diners to big city “Cheers” bars.

Entry is freely accessible to customers, visitors and a regular clientele; no exclusivity allowed. “Third places” are the idiosyncratic interstitial places that are the essence of neighborhood centers.

FEATURES OF A “THIRD PLACE”.

The quintessential “third place” is organically located, freely accessible to patrons with “regulars” a big part of the crowd; a neutral ground welcoming all socio-economic classes in an egalitarian setting. They are conversational with an appreciation of individual expression, participation and personalities; light hearted with a playful spirit and atmosphere.

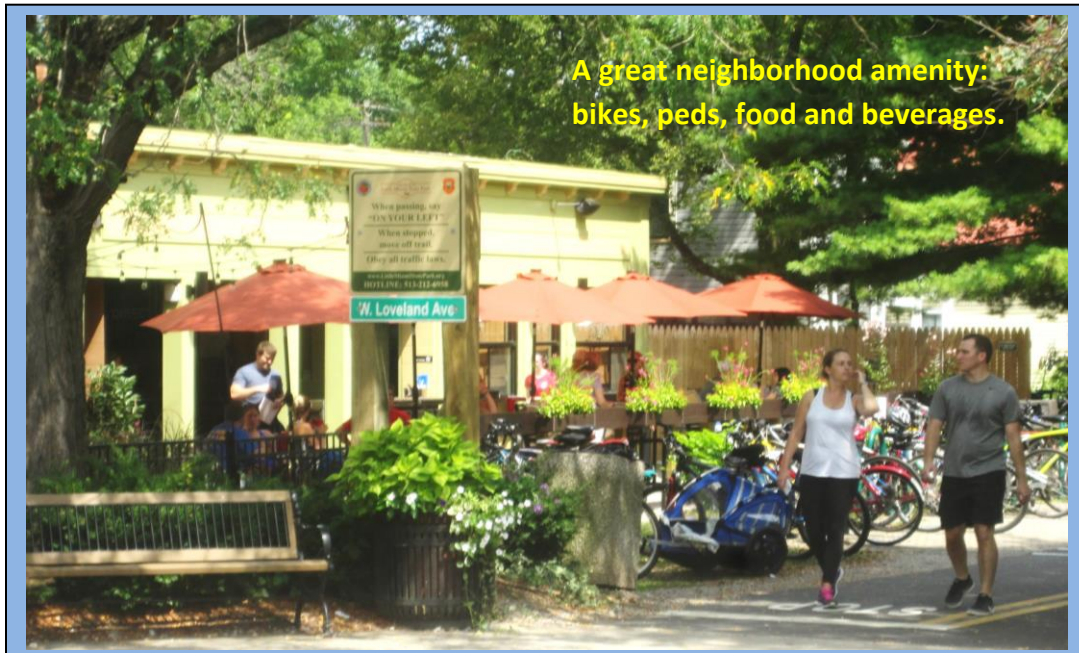
The Good Great Place

Cafés, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons and Other Hangouts at the Heart of the Community

Ray Oldenburg

Chapter 2, *The Character of Third Places.*

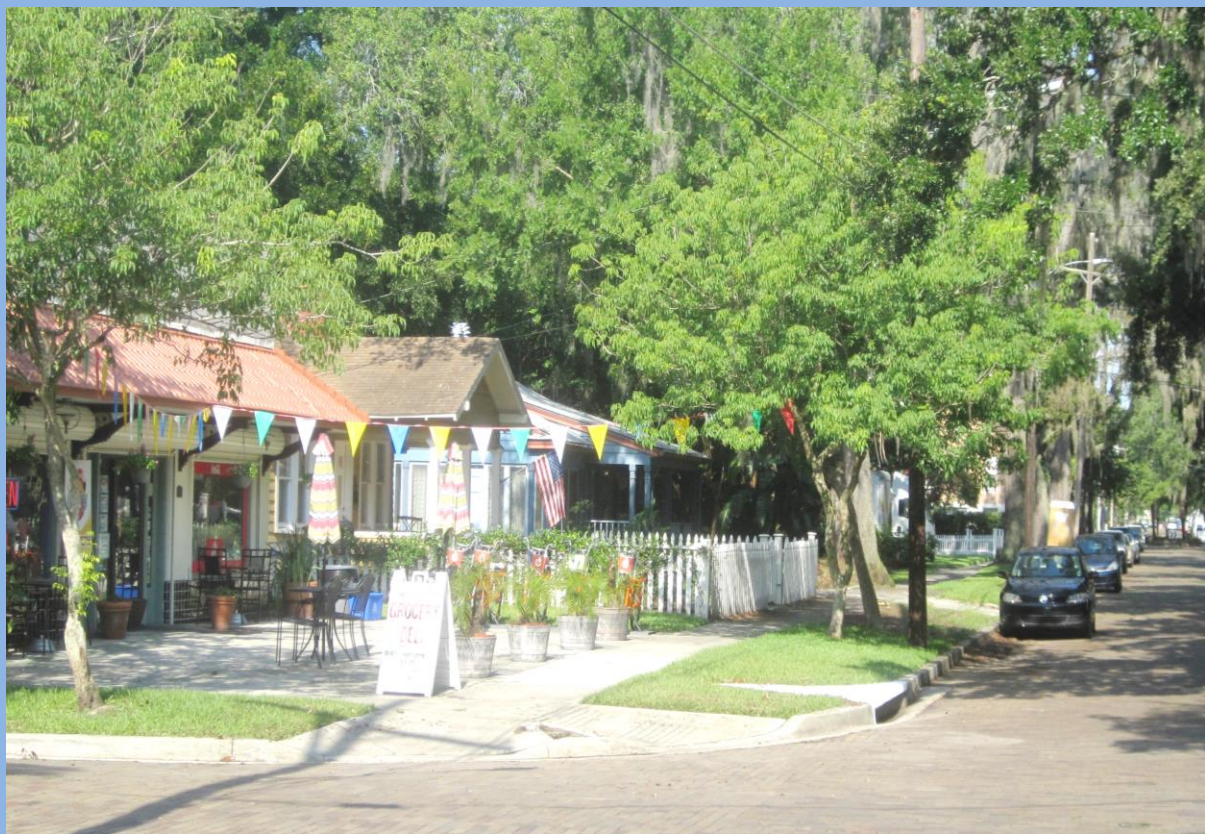
“Third places exist on neutral ground and serve to level their guests to a condition of social equality. Within these places, conversation is the primary activity and the major vehicle for the display and appreciation of human personality and individuality. Third places are taken for granted and most have a low profile. Since the social institutions of society make stronger claims on the individual, third places are normally open in the off hours, as well as at other times. The character of a third place is determined most of all by its regular clientele marked by a playful mood, which contrasts with people’s more serious involvement in other spheres. Though a radically different kind of setting from the home, the third place is remarkably similar to a good home in the psychological comfort and support that it extends.”



A great neighborhood amenity:
bikes, peds, food and beverages.

CONCLUSIONS: NEIGHBORHOOD “THIRD PLACES” ARE VALUABLE.

- Individual “third places” are usually discovered, not easily or quickly made.
- Once a “third place” is found, cherish it. They are best when they are unexpected; when they have some history, maybe a story. Like they say, “you can’t make old friends”.
- Creating old places in new neighborhoods is tough, but possible. Locations are site-dependent, part of the neighborhood fabric that is easily accessible, preferably by foot.
- Cafés, book stores, ice cream parlors, bars and other comfortable places that attract “regular” customers serve the purpose.
- “Third places” are major factors in creating character neighborhoods; the prize is neighborhood civility and sociability.
- The entire neighborhood or village center can be a “third place” if properly designed with cafés, diners, shops, conversational sidewalks, benches, plazas with seating and vendors with food and beverages; and lots of shade in the summer and warm respites in the winter.
- Sociability depends on social infrastructure that enables people to be with other people; neighborhood and village centers can be the place where they come together, on purpose or not.



A neighborhood café and deli...

No on-site parking, only window signs and lighting, among and adjacent to single family homes.