

Neighborhood Open Space.

NEIGHBORHOOD OPEN SPACE.

Character towns have neighborhoods that are “complete” with prominent lands devoted to parks and open spaces for the residents. When systematically organized, the collection of parks, school grounds, stormwater ponds, protected wetlands, lakes, streams, private lawns and gardens becomes a holistic, integrated system of lands and waters devoted to the neighborhood’s health and sociability. The system helps build character by engendering the neighborhood with pride, community spirit and overall conviviality.

Publicly accessible and connected parks, sidewalks, trails and open spaces are a neighborhood asset too precious to be ignored or disconnected from daily life. The park system’s wellbeing depends on collaboration of the city and the neighborhood association.

“Fire” by Judy Brown emotes the essential need for open space in fires, and in neighborhoods.

URBAN OPEN SPACE SYSTEM COMPONENTS.

1. Public Parks, Gardens and Ballfields.

Park parks, active and passive, are the most obvious part of every neighborhood and they often serve as its focal point. Parks provide managed spaces, gathering places for casual and programmed use, trail heads for bike/ped systems and environmental information centers for the school system.

Neighborhood parks also host little league baseball fields, soccer pitches, tennis courts and other active areas for kids and adults; mostly within walking and watching distance.

POEM: “FIRE” BY JUDY BROWN

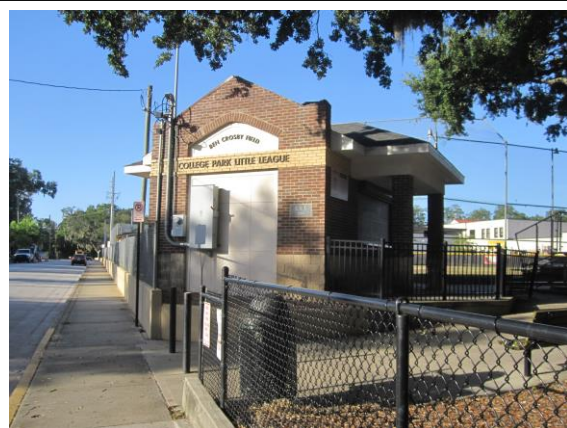
What makes a fire burn
Is space between the logs,
A breathing space.
Too much of a good thing,
Too many logs
Packed too tight
Can douse the flame
Almost a surely as a pail of water.

So building fires
Requires attention
To the spaces in between,
As much as to the wood.

When we are able to build
Open spaces
In the same way
We have learned
To pile on logs,
Then we can see how
it is fuel, and the absence of fuel
together, that make fire possible.

We only need lay a log
Lightly from time to time.
A fire
Grows
Simply because the space is there,
With openings
in which the flame
That know just how it wants to burn
Can find its way.

Judy Brown from *The Sea Accepts All Rivers*.
Judy Brown is also the author of *A Leader’s
Guide to Reflective Practice*, Trafford Publishing.

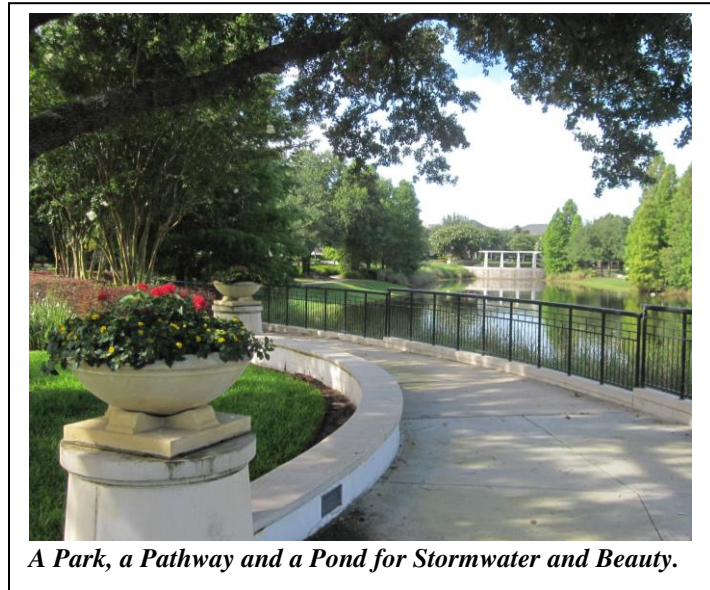


A Treasured Neighborhood Ballpark.

2. Stormwater Ponds.

In Florida, the rule of thumb is that 15 – 20% of any development site will be used for stormwater ponds. These can be ugly, isolated and fenced areas, or they can be beautiful features that create neighborhood and real estate value.

The multiple benefits offered by the creative design of stormwater areas builds lasting value. Landscaping is an appreciating asset; pleasant water features build real estate values and provide residential areas with many benefits.



3. Lawns and Grounds hosting Buildings.

Many neighborhood village buildings have lawns, plazas and other interesting open spaces for public use. The initial design and the connection of these building-based open spaces can be important elements of the neighborhood’s open space system. Neighborhood centers with libraries, elementary schools, small office buildings and community centers provide some of the most useful and beautiful open spaces in many towns.



Shared facilities provide real benefits, such as the use of public school grounds or the excess land at a water plant or fire station for a neighborhood park, Little League field or a soccer pitch.

Joint Use Agreements with other owners of parks and open spaces, like the school board, that cover insurance, hours of use, maintenance obligations and security can quickly multiply the inventory of local parks.



4. Urban Trails.

Where were all the bikers and walkers before there were urban trails? Trails are packed providing safe passage for recreational and commuter users. Trails and paths extend the reach of specialty parks for baseball, swimming, lacrosse or other activities that require special fields or buildings. The trails connect neighborhoods with schools, parks and neighborhood shops.



Bike Trails Connect Downtowns and Neighborhoods.

Trails can use utility easements, drainage-ways and street corridors with sufficient space for safe pedestrian and bike travel. Using established corridor lands enables the trail system to be extensive without having to buy new property. “Rails-to-trails” is a model that can be applied to many other types of linear corridors.



A Less Active Urban Open Space.

5. Wetlands, Conservation Lands, Water Bodies.

Natural areas are the prototypical open spaces, many of which are located near residential areas. The appropriate use and preservation of these natural lands adds significantly to real estate values. They also serve as visual amenities and sites for public gatherings and recreation. A synergistic system of parks, schools and natural open spaces creates and reflects the character of the town and the neighborhood by celebrating unique natural features, lakes and riverfronts.



A “Community” Center.

6. Hardscape Settings.

Urban open space also takes the form of hard-surface recreation places used by the public. These are mostly found in the neighborhood or village centers.

7. Really Complete Neighborhood Streets.

Really “complete streets” provide for all modes of travel and daily life. They are local streets, trails, parks and spaces that beautifully and walkably connect homes, apartments, parks, shops and schools.

CONCLUSIONS.

The combined power of a unified and coordinated open space system can create a strong image for the neighborhood. A great system of open spaces, parks, school grounds, water fronts, natural lands and historic homes can drive the character of the neighborhood to continue to improve its sociability and togetherness.

1. **Consider the neighborhood as a park.** Plan the neighborhood as apartments, houses, streets, schools, shops, parks and streets within an organized and connected open space system with paths to stroll and beauty to behold.
2. **Strong neighborhoods foster citywide spirit and neighborhood pride.**
3. **Use the open space system to organize the neighborhood** with visual and physical cues for wayfinding and safety.
4. **Have an expansive definition of urban open space.** Include the full range of places and spaces that serve physical and visual purposes in the system; then connect them physically, visually and informationally.
5. **Connect each park and elementary school with a trail, sidewalk, pathway or bikeway.**

6. **Encourage partnerships** between the neighborhood association, the city and school boards, utility companies, highway agencies, historic preservation boards and natural resource agencies to connect everything.
7. **Leverage the open space system to create neighborhood real estate value.** Use the parks and open space system to drive land use decisions, to guide the locations of parks, schools and community centers to promote neighborhood cohesion and sociability.
8. **Let public art reveal the neighborhood's personality.**

