

# ASSESSMENT OF SMALL TOWN FORM AND PATTERNS

by

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(ABSTRACT)

Overall physical growth in this country is characterized by homogeneity or a lack of connection with its surroundings. Designers and planners need to develop a way to combat homogeneity in future growth. In order to do this, we must look closely at an area to provide context for new development proposals. Small towns are becoming more attractive to people looking for a place to live. Therefore, these areas are experiencing rapid growth. There is a need for a method that can be used to assess the physical forms and patterns of small towns. The information generated by this method can be used by designers to preserve the existing character of small towns. The method being proposed is a series of questions designed to prompt the observer to discover three characteristics of a particular town of interest: its sense of place, its landscape vernacular, and its physical components. The use of the assessment method is demonstrated through two case studies. These studies provide examples of the type of information that can be discovered concerning small towns. The assessment method uncovers three important issues. First is the need to provide context for proposed design. Secondly, it shows the need to integrate new technology and techniques with the existing physical structure of a place. Lastly, this method illustrates the importance of assessing small town form and patterns when proposing new growth.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Many people in this country have positive feelings toward small towns. Whether they have lived in a small town at some point in time or not, there seems to be a sense of nostalgia for these places. People often cite social reasons for their attachment to small town America. These include regularly seeing acquaintances when walking through town, a lower incidence of crime activity, and the positive influence of locally owned businesses. However, I feel that the appeal of small towns is influenced by more than the feeling that “everyone knows everybody.” I will make the argument that physical form and spatial organization play a major role in influencing people’s perception of small towns as a place.

Planners and designers are trying to develop new models for residential development in this country. The neo-traditional town, such as Seaside in northern Florida, is a model of new development that is being proposed in many areas. These models are based on the characteristics of small American towns with a population of approximately 10,000 or fewer. This model challenges the planner/designer to determine what the components of a small town are. An interpretation of the inter-relationships and organizational patterns that are exhibited in small towns is also necessary. By analyzing its parts, both individually and as they relate to the whole, the structure of a town can be more fully understood. This information can be valuable to the planner/designer who is proposing new development based on the physical organization of a small town.

What techniques can be used to analyze the physical form and patterns of a small town ? This question forms the basis of this thesis that can be summarized as an inquiry into form, object, town, and pattern. Through a review of relevant literature, the second chapter of this study begins with the issue of place. The result of this section of the literature review is a discussion of the broad categories of physical form and their

influence on the “sense of place.” This initial material borrows from the concepts presented by Kevin Lynch in *The Image of the City*. Physical forms will be referred to in broad terms such as “path” and “boundary.” These categories of form will serve as a framework for the remainder of the thesis, in that each subsequent section will attempt to more narrowly focus on the definition of forms in the built environment. The second section of the literature review will deal with the vernacular landscape. Included in this discussion will be a more specific analysis of the physical objects of the landscape. For example, paths will be discussed in terms of roads and boundaries as walls and fences. The factors that influence the nature of these forms will also be introduced. The third section of the literature review will focus on the spatial relationships found in small towns. The intention will be to provide a more precise description of the relationships between concrete forms and how they help to create a “sense of place.” This body of literature will demonstrate which elements are important to the structure of small towns.

The third chapter will focus on the development of an assessment method that can be used to identify the important forms and patterns that are exhibited by small towns. The development of the “assessment tool” will be influenced by the literature concerning the sense of place, the vernacular landscape, and the physical structure of small towns. The purpose of this chapter is to develop a method for understanding towns as a “place” and as a way of objectively analyzing a town so that we can use that information as a guide for future design and planning efforts.

Lastly, the assessment method will be applied to two different small towns in order to determine its effectiveness. These examples will determine the merits of the assessment method and its importance relative to the design principles regarding small towns that are being used today.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

A technique for assessing physical form and patterns in small towns must be able to determine three characteristics: the “sense of place,” the landscape vernacular, and the physical structure. It is necessary to understand all three of these characteristics to capture the rich and diverse nature of a place. Each of these characteristics mentioned above will be discussed, and their relative importance within small towns will be identified.

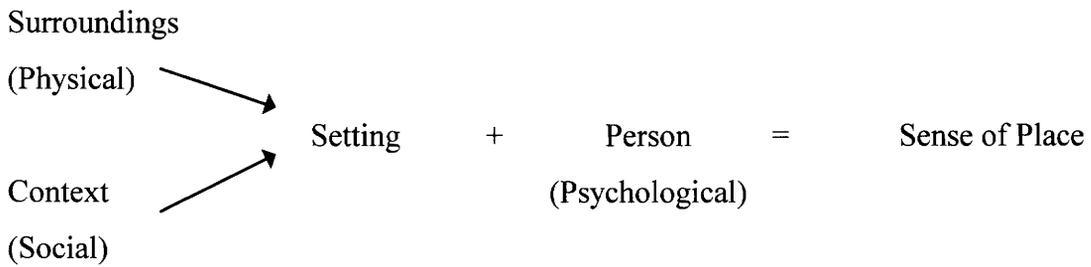
### **A. PLACE**

The issue of place will be considered in two parts: sense of place and structure of place. Sense of place deals with the experiences that are associated with places. This tends to give a place a sense of importance and meaning. Although the factors that influence the sense of place are both physical and social in nature, the following discussion will focus mainly on the physical factors. These factors will be presented through a discussion of the structure of place. This structure consists of broad categories of physical forms which influence one’s perception of a place.

#### **SENSE OF PLACE**

The sense of place is an important characteristic that must be accounted for when trying to determine the physical form and patterns that exist in a small town. Sense of place can also be described as a place experience. Small towns have a unique sense of place that contributes to the positive perceptions that many people have about living there.

Fritz Steele describes the sense of place as an “experience in a particular location” (1981, p.11). This experience is influenced by both the physical nature of the surroundings and social context within which it occurs. Steele uses the term “setting” to describe the resulting place that is influenced by both the physical and social elements that are found in a person’s surrounding environment (1981, p.11) (Figure 1). These two factors rarely influence place experiences independently. Rather, they both interact to create the relationship between a person and their surroundings. Places are composed of the physical attributes of the surroundings and the context provided by the attitudes of the people who are there. Norberg-Schulz states that place is composed of “concrete things having material substance, shape, texture, and color.” He goes on further to say that “these things determine an ‘environmental character’ that is the essence of place” (1979, p. 6). His thoughts here seem to be connected only with the physical nature of place. This is supported by his belief that “the existential purpose of building (architecture) is to make a site become a place, that is, to uncover meanings potentially present in the given environment” (Norberg-Schulz, 1979, p. 18). This means that the built form of a place predominates the social interaction that subsequently occurs there. Relph introduces the role of social action by arguing that existential space is constantly being created and transformed by the activity of humans that results in the creation of patterns and significant structures of built form (1976). While the influences of the surroundings and the context do not usually act independently of each other, this document will concentrate mainly on the physical components that make up the surroundings of a place. There is a wide range of literature that supports the importance of social interaction within the public landscape. The purpose here is not to dismiss the influence of this interaction on our experience of places, rather, the assumption will be that these social functions are vital to a place. The focus here will be on how the physical environment impacts places and the influence of people on a place will be discussed in this context.



**Figure 1.** The relationship of influences on the sense on place. Steele, Fritz. 1981. p. 12.

The physical features of a setting can influence both the activities and feelings of people who are using the place (Steele, 1981). Objects such as furniture, open space, and other people have an impact on activities that occur in a given location. For example, a large open lawn area within a park offers the opportunity for active recreational activities such as throwing a Frisbee or jogging. On the other hand, an urban plaza that is fairly small, with only benches, and no open lawn space would accommodate mostly passive activities, such as eating lunch or talking with friends. People’s feelings and emotions can be influenced by factors such as color, lighting and texture. Generally speaking, warm colors, such as reds, have a “stimulating effect” on people and cool colors, such as blues, can have the inverse “calming” reaction. Other features which impact on feelings include local weather patterns and objects with historical or symbolic meanings, such as monuments and statues (Steele, 1981).

Steele describes places in terms of a “transactional system” (1981, p.9). This implies that both the person and the location each give and receive something from the other. People give places a feeling of action and life; and they receive an experience by virtue of their presence in a location. A place offers people a location for potential interaction. In turn, a place receives that sense of action and life from its users. Places can also offer a perceived level of personal control and security for many people. This can prove to be a

positive attribute by allowing people to feel more comfortable in a place. However, it can deter people from venturing outside of this secure place in search of other experiences. Small towns which exhibit a strong sense of place often have similar influences on the local residents. This personal control and security often persuades people to live in small towns. It has also led to the association of small towns and their residents with values and beliefs that are conservative and slow to adopt change.

A sense of place is created through the interaction of the physical components of the environment and the social context within which they occur. It is obvious that the physical forms and patterns are an important factor which influences the sense of place in a particular location. The sense of place that is exhibited in a small town is a very important, but sometimes elusive, characteristic. Nevertheless, the investigation of the physical relationships of small town form must account for the influence of these forms on place experiences in small towns.

## **STRUCTURE OF PLACE**

The previous discussion identified the two major influences on the sense of place as the physical surroundings and the social context. This section will focus on the physical forms that influence the sense of place. The identification of these forms will serve as a catalyst for further discussion of the physical components of small towns and for the assessment method of physical form and patterns.

Relph defines places as “centers of meaning, or focuses of intention and purpose . . . which have an inside that can be experienced as something different from an outside” (1976, p. 22). Therefore, it is the arrangement of the physical form that signifies the relationship between “inside” and “outside.” Norberg-Schulz describes the structure of

places as being dynamic in nature yet still possessing a degree of stability. (1979) This means that the stability of the physical structure of a place is not compromised through the addition of new forms; instead the structure accommodates these forms as an integral part of the overall structure. The structure is well defined and it dictates how change will occur. This can be thought of in terms of new construction within an existing framework of buildings. Norberg-Schulz is stating that new forms can be incorporated into the existing structure without destroying it or compromising its character.

There is a significant body of literature that attempts to describe the structure of places by analyzing their individual physical components. Steele identifies five physical features that have a strong influence on a setting. They are “location, boundaries, geographic distinctiveness, scale and proportion, and rich images” (1981, p.53). Lynch describes the image of cities through analysis of the effects of perceptible physical objects. He uses the terms “path, node, edge, district, and landmark” as a method of understanding the physical structure of the urban environment (1960, p. 47). Relph also uses the terms “boundary, path, and node” in his description of the components of horizontal structure (1976, p. 20). Norberg-Schulz states that “man-made places of the environment are first of all ‘settlements’ of different scale and secondly ‘paths’ which connect these settlements, as well as various elements which transform nature into a cultural landscape” (1979, p. 10).

A combination of the above terminology will be used to discuss the categories of physical forms that make up places. These forms will be considered in terms of their characteristics and their impact on the surroundings. The terms such as path and boundary are broad descriptors of physical objects that are found in the landscape. The objective is to introduce the physical forms: path, boundary, edge, node, landmark; and use them as a basis for the later discussion of actual physical objects which are found in small towns.

## **Location**

An important characteristic of a place is its geographic location. A place is influenced by natural features, such as the topography, and the natural variables, such as the climate, of a particular location. The influence of these features varies with the location; some places are strongly tied to the surrounding features while others are influenced very little. In order to properly assess the impact of the physical characteristics of a place, it is important to understand the effects the location has.

All events can be described with reference to their location. Typically places are defined in geographic terms: a description of “where” it is. Location relates to the “settings placement in geographic space: where it is and how it relates to its surroundings” (Steele, 1981, p.53). The conformity and/or contrast of a setting to its geographic surroundings influences the character of a place. Villages that developed in mountainous regions have evolved characteristics in response to their location. Similarly, desert communities have developed their own adaptations to their surroundings. However, the built form within these communities is as different as the bio-regional factors that are associated with their geographic location.

A majority of people associate themselves and others with the places that they come from and they have cultural attitudes or stereotypes based on these places or regions. Zelinsky has conceptually divided the United States into cultural regions that have distinct characteristics which influence the people and activities within them (1973). The names of particular locations serve to strengthen the associations between the place and the people who live there. “The naming of regions and places is indeed part of a fundamental structuring of existential space” (Relph, 1976, p. 16). Places with no names are perceived to be chaotic, without orientation and familiar points of reference. Upon entering previously unexplored regions, man used the act of naming places or at least the

prominent features that surrounded them to give a human quality to these uninhabited places (Relph, 1976). Today, names of places can serve as historical and cultural references or can be used with respect to natural features that are now, or were once, present in a particular location. Whatever their origin, the names of locations assist in the identification and associations between places and their people.

Norberg-Schulz argues that place “means something more than location” (1979, p. 7). Relph continues this line of thought by proposing that “location is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition of place” (1976, p. 29). This suggests that geographic location is a characteristic that can be associated with a place; it may have an influence on a place but it does not define the sense of place. Nevertheless, the assessment of the implications of physical form and patterns on a place should account for the influences of its location. Geographic location seems to have a greater importance in determining the characteristics of the vernacular landscape, which will be discussed later.

## **Path**

Paths serve as the skeleton of a place around which other elements are arranged in the landscape. They provide connections between places via paths along which people travel. By creating these links and travel routes, corridors influence travelers’ perspectives of their surroundings. The physical characteristics of a corridor also play a large role in determining how the surrounding forms are organized. This impact will be explored in greater detail in the following section.

Lynch uses the term path to describe the “channels along which the observer customarily, occasionally, or potentially moves” (1960, p. 47). His research into the images people associate with their city revealed that the path is viewed as the predominant element in the urban environment (1960, p. 49). Relph states that “paths reflect the directions and

intensities of intentions and experiences, and serve as the structural axes of existential space” (1976, pp. 20-21). Wampler adds that paths are “an avenue for movement and, at the same time, a way to view the landscape” (1993, p. 68). Findley argues that the “conscious establishment of a path implies a connection between two places” (1993, p. 72).

The association of the urban image with the dominant corridors is influenced by several characteristics. The most important influences are the conventional routes of travel during the course of one’s routine. Thus, major roads that many used to get to work, shopping areas, or other frequently used locations were perceived as important to the physical structure of the city (Lynch, 1960). This seems logical due to the fact that people would be more familiar and perhaps more comfortable with areas of the city that they use consistently. Another characteristic that gives streets a greater perceived level of importance is the presence of activity along a portion of its length (Lynch, 1960). The presence of people concentrated in one location tells the observer that this is an important place both for special activities that may be occurring there and for the opportunity for social interaction. Lynch also found that the spatial character of the street was very important to its identity. Findley argues that paths should be considered as “spaces in between” either buildings or other boundaries (1993). The space contained between the buildings that line street creates a hierarchy of streets based on their width. Commonly, street corridors that had the greatest width were seen as having greater importance within the structure of the city than those which were more narrow. Lynch cites the “common association of main streets with width and side streets with narrowness” (1960, p. 50). Findley noted that paths have two important dimensions. One is the width that has been previously addressed. The other is the linear dimension. Obviously, this dimension can change as one moves along the path. If the field of view of the traveler is enclosed by some physical boundary, the space of the path in front of them is compressed as they move forward (Findley, 1993). One final street characteristic that was identified by

Lynch was the details of the objects within the corridor. Elements such as the building facades, textures of the paving patterns, and street plantings make the street seem more important (Lynch, 1960).

An important characteristic of paths that should be noted here is their “directional quality” (Lynch, 1960). Traveling along a path in one direction can lead to a different experience than traveling along the same path in the opposite direction. Lynch noted that many people associate roads with their beginnings (origins) and their ends (destinations). There can be a hierarchical relationship between each end of a path. One end may have a greater importance than the other or they may have similar significance (Findley, 1993). Traveling down a path toward the more “important” end could produce a different experience than heading away from it. Similarly, major landmarks along a route can serve to segment the road into mentally digestible parts and assist the traveler in comprehending where they are along the length of the road. Also, the means of transport and the character of the journey to a given location are important components that influence our experience of a place (Steele, 1981). For example, a small town that is approached by driving down a tree-lined street flanked by stately farmhouses results in a distinctly different experience as opposed to a city that is approached via an interstate highway.

It should be clear that the corridor is a very influential form in the landscape. These avenues for travel are the easiest form to identify, but they are also one of the most underestimated features when determining the impact of form on the surrounding environment. The physical qualities of corridors have such a significant impact on our sense of place due to the fact that a majority of our time is spent traveling along them. The landscape is revealed to us as we travel along these paths. Therefore, the impact of a corridor on the perceived structure of the landscape must be clearly comprehended in order to obtain an understanding of a particular place.

## **Boundaries and Borders**

Another major category of physical form is the boundary. Boundaries serve to delineate areas in the landscape. For our purposes, the term boundary will be used to describe two different types of form. The first type can be considered as an implied demarcation between two distinct areas. The second type of boundary provides spatial definition and enclosure to a space. In order to eliminate any confusion between these two, a common terminology will be developed to discuss these two forms. The term boundary will be used to describe the division between separate areas and the term border will refer to the physical forms which define a space and create an enclosure.

Physical borders establish an inside-outside relationship between built forms. That is, they possess the characteristic of creating enclosure. Norberg-Schulz states that “any enclosure becomes a *center* which may function as a ‘focus’ for its surroundings ... [t]he (border) makes the spatial structure visible as continuous or discontinuous extension, direction, and rhythm” (1979, p. 12). Enclosure is an important physical property that influences our perception. Physical objects are more easily noticed if borders are present that define a visual area (Steele, 1981).

Lynch noted that the strongest border element in the landscape is one that was “visually prominent, . . . continuous in form, and impenetrable to cross movement.” (1960, p. 62) The prominence of a border in the landscape can be achieved without the entire length being visible. An entire wall can be perceived even if it is only seen at a few points along its length. Furthermore, the impenetrable nature of a physical border is not always necessary to create a strong edge. Indeed, Norberg-Schulz indicates that the “enclosing properties of a (border) are determined by its openings.” (1979, p. 12) Openings can be defined by a gate that controls access or these openings may provide a continuous passage through them. Findley describes the function of gates as “sentries to the path - guarding,

celebrating, or drawing attention to the acts of arrival and departure”. (1993, p. 74) This tends to strengthen the inside-outside properties of a place by marking the point at which the space begins or ends depending on whether you are entering or exiting the space.

Boundaries are typically linear in form and, for the most part, are not used as routes for circulation. In his discussion of edges, Lynch defines them as “boundaries between two phases [or] linear breaks in continuity” (Lynch, 1960, p.47). Steele defines a boundary as “a clear delineation of a setting from its surroundings” (1981, p.55). Therefore, boundaries can be defined as a division between two distinct areas in the landscape. Boundaries of this nature are not always easily perceived in the landscape. Often, these boundaries are marked by the subtle changes in the physical forms that occur. Boundaries can also mark the extent of social and/or political influences and beliefs.

Jackson argues that even though we except the notion of boundaries and their legal descriptions, we are growing tired of seeing them. “On an individual scale we are beginning to suspect that walls and fences are a costly nuisance to maintain, occupy much space, and far from guaranteeing privacy, actually invite vandalism and intrusion” (Jackson, 1984, p. 16). Jackson states that walls have far greater implications than that of only providing protection and security. He feels that landscapes with solidly constructed and highly maintained walls, fences, and hedges represent a place where political identity is important. This is “a landscape where lawyers make a good living and everyone knows how much land he owns.” (Jackson, 1984 p.15) What Jackson is referring to is not necessarily the fences and walls that are present, but the objectives and attitudes that they portray. These boundaries in the political landscape exemplify the beliefs of a community which feels it needs to provide control and to demonstrate a sense of order.

Boundaries can be found at a variety of scales in the landscape. Small scale boundaries can be created by benches placed within a public square. At a slightly larger scale, walls, fences, or hedges can be used around buildings to create a “clear identity as a compound or enclave” (Steele, 1981, p.55). Jackson describes the method which physical boundaries were used by early Euro-Americans. Typically, places of residence or other buildings were surrounded by fences or walls to provide a sense of security or isolation. As a result of these boundaries, a “buffer zone” is created between the objects and their surroundings. This effect was often used with buildings that held a special importance for early American communities. A wall and this buffer space surrounding a courthouse or a church gave these structures a sense of distinction. Jackson states that this surrounding space “was merely a protective envelope or packaging” and that the wall represented the “ultimate legal symbol of autonomy” (Jackson, 1984, p. 15).

Boundaries can also define districts within large cities and small towns. Borders of this nature can be in the form of “major roads, rivers, or other barriers to pedestrian movement” (Steele, 1981, p.55). Entire cities or towns can have a surrounding boundary. Unique geographic features, such as a mountain range can serve this purpose. Lynch found that water was a strong edge element. He cites an example using Chicago and Lake Michigan. The connection of the city with the waterfront is so strong that residents and people who do not live there associate the two (Lynch, 1960). The wind blowing off of Lake Michigan is one reason that Chicago is known by many as the “windy city.” Lynch found that an edge that is formed by a flowing water body, a stream or river, exhibited directional characteristics similar to those of the path. There were associations with which side of a river the viewer was on, as well as, which way the water was flowing in relation to the observer and other physical elements in the landscape (Lynch, 1960). An example of a man-made boundary of this scale would be a belt-line or highway that forms a loop around a city. Atlanta, Georgia and Raleigh, North Carolina are two cities that have these features. Many people use these highways to move within

the city and the location of particular destinations are often associated with respect to their proximity to the belt-line.

At any scale, boundaries and borders serve to create a sense of place for a particular area. They define where the place begins and ends, where one knows whether they are in a place or outside of it. When assessing the physical form of a place, the first step is to differentiate between boundaries and borders. As was mentioned above, both of these elements can be thought of as a type of edge. The difference is how they are used in the landscape. Boundaries are edges that occur between two areas and borders are physical elements which provide spatial definition. Once this distinction is made, the impacts of each of these forms on the sense of needs to be determined.

## **Districts**

In the previous discussion, boundaries were described as divisions between two different areas within a larger landscape. These distinct areas are commonly referred to as districts and are important to the overall structure of a place. They reduce a larger area into a series of smaller parts, each with its own unique characteristics that identify it as a district. However, instead of reducing a larger environment into a series of parts, districts can assist in creating a greater understanding and sense of place about a particular location. The smaller size of a district makes it easier for observers to comprehend its entire area. With larger towns and cities, the comprehension of the entire physical structure may not be as easily achieved. Therefore a larger area can be understood in terms of its smaller districts.

Districts are relatively large two-dimensional sections of the city which have an identifying character. Districts have the quality of both internal and external characteristics. They can be recognized due to their common character and can also be used as an external reference point for navigation through the city. The physical

components that define the common character of a district are numerous but they can include “texture, space, form, detail, symbol, building type, use, activity, inhabitants, degree of maintenance, [and] topography” (Lynch, 1960, p. 67). Lynch uses the example of the homogeneity in the character of building facades in Boston to illustrate how common physical themes can define districts. Material, ornament, and fenestration are all used in this context (1960).

Districts commonly have a “strong core [which is] surrounded by a thematic gradient which gradually dwindles away” (Lynch, 1960, p. 70). Meinig uses the terms “core, domain and sphere” to describe zones of cultural influence which also exhibit the characteristic of a strong center with surrounding areas of decreasing concentration (cited in Zelinsky, 1973, p. 114). For this reason districts may not have a clear, well defined boundary. In the surrounding areas of influence, the feeling of being either inside or outside of the district would seem to be somewhat subjective and would vary between different observers and direction of travel.

In the urban environment, Lynch found that districts can either be isolated or located adjacent to one another. The surrounding areas of districts that stand alone within the structure of the city rely on their contrast with this structure as a means of identification. On the other hand, a district with its own defining characteristics serves to strengthen the identity of an adjacent district through the contrast of the different elements that define each as a district (Lynch, 1960).

Districts are important ordering devices within the structure of a place. They serve to reduce a larger environment into a series of visually digestible parts. These parts, while possessing some unique characteristics, serve to strengthen the overall structure of a place and help to create a stronger sense of place. Due to the fact that these districts enable the observer to better comprehend the overall structure of a place, an assessment technique

that incorporates the district form would also be able to provide a more clear understanding of this structure.

## **Nodes**

Just as districts are smaller components of an overall structure, the node is an even smaller component that provides some insight into the structure of a place. If a district is thought of as an area, nodes would be considered points in the landscape. Lynch defines a node as a “strategic spot in a city into which an observer can enter, and which [is] the intensive foci to and from which he is traveling” (1960, p. 47). Nodes can also be considered as “centers of special importance and meaning which are distinguished by their quality of insideness” (Relph, 1976, p. 21). These points are usually well known to those who are familiar with a particular place. Navigation through a place and even the entire structure of a place can usually be described in relation to the important nodes.

Typically, nodes occur at the junction of two important paths. At these junctions, people are required to make decisions regarding their direction of travel which usually results in a greater attention to detail on the part of the traveler. Steele would call this an example of “heightened awareness” (1981, p. 29). A common result is that elements which are adjacent to nodes are perceived as being more important due to their location (Lynch, 1960). Jackson uses the landscape of Rome to illustrate the importance of the junction of two paths. He states that the “nucleus of the landscape was the point of intersection of two highways . . . and it was here that a town was usually built” (1984, p. 26).

Two other types of nodes are thematic concentrations and cores. Thematic concentrations are similar to districts in that they are defined internally by similar physical objects and/or a common treatment of elements. A node that acts as a core is perceived as being a focal point of the center of a city or larger region. However, the development of nodes that are

strong enough to be thought of as centers for an entire region is uncommon in the U.S. (Lynch, 1960).

The importance of nodes is similar to that of the district in that it provides a physical form that is smaller than the overall environment of which it is a part. These smaller forms can be identified more easily than can the entire structure of a place. Therefore, its significance for understanding an entire place is that it allows the structure of the whole to be broken down into easily identifiable parts. The relationships and patterns formed by these nodes compromise part of the overall structure of the place.

### **Landmarks**

Yet another physical form that can assist in the understanding of the overall structure of a place is the landmark. These forms are identified as being important components and are often unique to a place. This uniqueness enhances an area's sense of place by providing physical forms that further differentiate one place from another. This is why landmarks are so important to a place; they allow the members of a community to associate a place with distinct forms that are scattered throughout the area.

Lynch describes landmarks as "simple elements which may vary widely in scale (that serve as) point references considered to be external to the observer" (1960, p. 78). Landmarks have a wide variety of uses as guiding elements within the landscape. They can be used as a method of finding one's way from one place to another and also as a way to orient oneself within the landscape. "They are frequently used clues of identity and seem to be increasingly relied upon as the journey becomes more familiar" (Lynch, 1960, p. 48). Some landmarks are only visible from relatively short distances, while others can be seen from afar. The list of objects that serve as landmarks in a particular location can

be extremely long and vary somewhat between individuals. The scale of landmarks can vary from dominant geographic features to buildings to single signs (Lynch, 1960).

In spite of the wide range of possible objects that are considered landmarks, Lynch identified several characteristics that are associated with them. He notes that their “key physical characteristic is . . . some aspect that is unique or memorable in the context” of the surroundings (Lynch, 1960, p. 78). This memorable quality of landmarks is enhanced “if they have a clear form, if they contrast with their background, and if there is some prominence of [their] spatial location” (Lynch, 1960, p. 78). The contrast of the object with its surroundings seems to have the greatest influence on the strength of the object as a landmark (Lynch, 1960).

Many landmarks are found within the public spaces of cities and small towns. A common characteristic of public spaces is the references to local history that they contain. They are typically “adorned with statues of local heroes and monuments to important events” (Jackson, 1984, p.18). The monument is an object that often serves the purpose of a landmark. Jackson describes the monument as a “permanent construction designed to keep alive the memory of a person or event [which we give] a public character and a public location.” (cited in Zube, 1970, p. 158) This can be an educational tool for residents of the community. It also can heighten the community’s pride and awareness of itself by enabling people to identify their place of residence with important historical figures and/or events that have occurred there. Monuments serve as a reference to the history of an area, whereas the public space in which they are placed serve as a “reminder of the present” (Zube, 1970, p. 158). The form of monuments has evolved over the centuries to include “triumphal arches to statues to larger landscapes such as parks” (Zube, 1970, p. 158).

Landmarks identify important locations within a place. These locations can be associated with historical or important events and people. These locations can be influential at a variety of scales. They can be small and visible from only a limited range or they can be prominent features throughout a larger area that call attention to a particular location. The larger the range of influence that a particular landmark has, the greater the effect that it has on the overall place.

## **THE IMPLICATIONS OF PLACE**

The sense of place or place experience is but one of the characteristics that will influence the development of an assessment method for the physical form and patterns of small towns. However, it is obvious that this feature is a very important component that must be accounted for in the assessment method.

The influences of physical surroundings on sense of place can be identified through a comprehensive investigation. Of the physical forms that were discussed above, corridors seem to have the greatest impact since the observer of the surroundings is commonly traveling along them. However, the relative importance of each of these forms will vary among different settings. Even though the physical forms that create the structure of a place were discussed as separate entities, it is important to realize that these forms do not influence a place independently of each other. Instead, it is the physical relationships between all of these forms which combine to create the structure of a place. An assessment method which intends to utilize these forms as a way to understand the structure of a small town, should identify both the relationships between similar forms and the overall patterns created through a combination of forms. However, the simple identification of the physical forms of a place does not alone account for the sense of

place. These forms need to be considered in relation to how they influence the experience of a place in order for the assessment method to be effective and useful.

## **B. LANDSCAPE VERNACULAR**

The second characteristic of small towns which must be accounted for in the assessment method is the landscape vernacular. This term describes the objects in the landscape which have developed in response to the physical factors of a location and the cultural factors of the community. The objective of this section is to use the physical forms discussed earlier and show how these forms are manifested as objects influenced by physical and cultural factors. For example, the properties of the boundary form will be further defined in object terms such as the wall and fence. This begins the process of focusing on the implications of general form in the landscape of the small town.

Jackson (1984) discusses the landscape using terms such as “boundary, road, and forum.” He uses these terms to describe what he calls a landscape vernacular. Also important to the understanding of vernacular is that built form is a result of “local techniques, local materials, and the [climate, traditions, and economy of the local environment]” (Jackson, 1984, p. 85). Hough underscores these ideas of Jackson by describing the forms of vernacular places as being “limited by agricultural and building technology, native materials, climate, soils, and established traditions” (1990, p. 34). Norton states that the vernacular landscape is composed of “regions to which a particular meaning is attached and [which possess] a social and likely symbolic identity (1989, p. 119). The vernacular landscape is composed of built forms which result from a combination of the needs of the inhabitants and the limitations which are posed by a particular location. This landscape evolves over time through cultural transformations that follow patterns which are similar to natural processes. Usually these forces occur

“from an inherent drive to fill a niche, to seize an opportunity, or to enhance one’s chances of survival or success” (Hough, 1990, p. 48). Early building form resulted from a practical necessity of shelter and security. Decisions to provide these needs were driven mainly by functional and pragmatic issues as opposed to the result of trying to achieve an overall design concept (Hough, 1990).

Although humans have altered many, if not all, of the biophysical processes that occur in the landscape, these natural patterns are still a primary influence on its character. Throughout the world, climate has had the greatest influence in creating diverse forms in the landscape (Hough, 1990). Climate affects built form in the same manner that it influences land forms, vegetation and animal communities. Without the technological or economic resources to ignore climate, “built form has evolved by developing ways to moderate its effects” (Hough, 1990, p. 47). Just as weather patterns vary regionally, so do methods which are developed to mitigate the impact on the inhabitants of an area. The result of these varying methods worked to create vernacular forms that are often unique to a particular location or region. Sloane uses early American farms to illustrate this point. Farm buildings in the mid-Atlantic states were typically comprised of a series of separate buildings, all serving different functions, that “rambled” across the landscape forming a small scale “community” pattern. The harsh winter climate of Maine and New Hampshire resulted in the incorporation of these many separate buildings in to one connected structure that was internally segregated into different functions. This allowed the farmer to fulfill his daily chores without having to confront the harsh cold and snow (Sloane, 1955). What results from these different responses to climate is a series of physical forms that have a significant impact on the visual and spatial character of the landscape.

Jackson suggests that built form in the vernacular landscape resulted from local craftsmen using local building techniques and materials. In the vernacular landscape,

materials dictate the style of construction. Their size, shape, and weight determined, and sometimes limited how, and where they were used. The limitations that were imposed by the use of a particular material led to locally unique building techniques. The solutions to the problems that the use of a material created were passed along to others in the local community and a sphere of influence was created (Hough, 1990).

The vernacular landscape consists of physical objects which result from the specific response to a particular functional or pragmatic issue. The physical objects of can also be considered in these terms. The following discussion of buildings, roads, walls and fences, and public space will demonstrate how the characteristics of these objects have been influenced by the factors associated with the landscape vernacular.

## **Buildings**

Buildings are an important component of the vernacular landscape. The attributes of buildings that are important to the assessment method are their exterior characteristics and spatial implications. The exterior facades will be discussed in greater detail in the section of the literature review entitled “Towns”.

Jackson insists that the use of the term vernacular indicates a “traditional rural or small town dwelling of the farmer, craftsman, or wage-earner” (1984, p. 85). However, I would like to expand his thoughts to include other buildings in the landscape. In the context of this study, buildings will be considered in terms of their spatial implications in the landscape. The size, form, materials, and exterior details of buildings have an effect on both the vertical and horizontal organization of the built environment

As vertical elements, buildings can be perceived as the borders of open space. Whether this space is a road, plaza, or town square, the limits of the space can be defined by the

buildings that surround them. Buildings can also be used as landmarks within the structure of built form. Distinctive characteristics or contrasting scale is often used to differentiate a building from its surroundings.

The amount of land that is occupied by built structures relative to the surrounding open space influences the horizontal structure of a particular location. We often use this characteristic to differentiate between urban and rural places. Typically, the amount of building coverage tends to decrease as you move away from the center of the urban environment. This issue is simplified to illustrate the influence of horizontal structure. In reality, density and its related topics is very complex and it does not conform to a simple gradient that decreases uniformly from one concentrated point. However, it does indicate that categories of land uses, such as residential, town, or city, can be developed based on the influence of their horizontal structure.

The arrangement of buildings in the landscape has a profound effect on the character and “feel” of a place through the creation of space. The earlier section on borders emphasized the implications of spatial definition. The physical dimensions or volume of the space between buildings is inversely related to building density. Traditionally, higher densities in small towns have been associated with commercial land uses of the downtown. The implications of this relationship between building density and the dimensions of the surrounding space must be an integral part of the method of assessing small town form and patterns.

## **Roads**

The earlier discussion of corridors emphasized the importance of these forms in the landscape. Likewise, the road is probably the most important corridor to our society in the landscape. The increasing presence of the automobile has led to a reliance on our

road system to provide for our needs of transportation. The effects of the road goes beyond these impacts on our daily lives. The road is an extremely important ordering device within the landscape. It influences the movement of people through space and impacts the arrangement of other objects in the landscape.

The philosophical arguments concerning the necessity of roads versus the need for the development of other modes of transport will remain outside of this discussion. It will be accepted that the automobile has become a dominant mode of transportation without placing a value judgment upon that fact. In our modern society the highway and road corridors are quickly becoming a dominant and heavily relied upon element of the landscape. The “highway stands for unity [and] joins one part of the landscape with another . . . [enabling] an organized society to make its influence felt everywhere” (Zube, 1970, p. 155). Therefore, as places have developed the need to incorporate automobile access has had a dramatic impact on spatial forms.

In early America there was a general feeling among political leaders that “every citizen, every landowner should have easy access to a road leading to the political center” (Jackson, 1984, p. 37). This allowed citizens to get to the nearest town to undertake such activities such as voting, paying taxes, or going to church. Clay notes that during this time the value of the location of one’s house, office, and activities was measured relative to the distance that it was from the political center or downtown (Clay, 1973). These political beliefs are reflected in the application of the grid system across much of the continental United States. Jackson notes that two-thirds of the country employed this method of structuring the road system. The principle result of the system was to divide the landscape into “sections” of one square mile in area. These sections are grouped into townships consisting of thirty six square miles. The theory is that every square mile is surrounded by public roads. In reality, however, there are many sections in the western

United States that are not surrounded by roads. The low population levels do not warrant the construction of these roads at this time (Jackson, 1984).

Clay, in his study of urban areas, revealed a distinct feature in the street pattern of many cities. This feature, called a “break”, occurs at the junction of two different street patterns and results in a series of “awkward, irregular, and angled street junctions” (Clay, 1973, p. 42). Breaks can occur due to adjoining grid patterns with different orientations, a street that crosses a grid at an angle, or a change in the character of the street patterns. Clay uses examples from the midwest and western United States to describe the typical evolution of street patterns. Usually breaks occur along the edges of original settlements or city plans. This original development was commonly a grid pattern aligned with an adjacent waterway or the main railroad line. Subsequent development often resulted in a grid street system oriented differently than the original. The final phase in this evolution occurred when the growing street pattern encountered the existing national grid system and the new streets adopted this N-S-E-W orientation (Clay, 1973). Breaks can have a positive effect by creating highly accessible sites along its length that are attractive for urban development. A negative result of breaks on the street pattern is that they create “psychological, as well as geographical, barriers” that can be disruptive to the urban environment. Whether the effects are positive or negative, breaks seldom fail to influence the physical and social character of the location.

Jackson goes on to point out that the reasons for developing roads, for political objectives, were soon abandoned for economic purposes. Instead of building a road that lead someone to church or to the courthouse, roads were seen as avenues to economic points of interest, such as industrial centers. They took the farmer to the market so that he could sell his products, and they also brought citizens to these locations so that they could make purchases. Instead of roads that lead “in” to town, they were now considered to lead “away” from the city center. “No longer can we be certain that . . . all things of

importance are best transacted at the center” (Clay, 1973, p. 34). This way of thinking about roads is has been influenced greatly by the automobile and its ability to transport us to areas that are beyond our own neighborhoods.

Sloane describes the physical differences between roads that were built for different purposes in his discussion of the Hazen Road built in the late 1700’s in northern Vermont. The Hazen Road was designed for the military use of allowing troops to easily move (march) through the area. The strategic placement of the military roads sought the protection of the natural topography. This type of road followed the “hilltops, avoiding valleys and swampy areas. The later mill and factory roads which were guided by economic motives, followed the rivers and valley streams where industries settled” (Sloane, 1955, p. 62). However, Clay notes that these early “river strips” soon migrated back up the slope to higher ground that was less prone to flooding (1973) (See Figure 4).

The importance of the roads in small towns can not be understated. Their influence on the other physical forms determines to a large extent the structure of the landscape. For this reason, the assessment method of towns must incorporate the road and street patterns into the analysis.

### **Walls and Fences**

Walls and fences are objects in the landscape which corresponds to the boundary category of physical form mentioned previously. Like other elements in the vernacular landscape, the shape, size, configuration, and materials of walls and fences were influenced by necessity and cultural traditions. The influences of walls and fences on the overall structure of the landscape could be considered minor as compared to that of the road. However, these objects have several important impacts in the landscape.

The European contemporaries of early Americans used the fence for military purposes, as a symbol of protection. Sloane points out that many European visitors to the early American landscape were highly critical of the widespread use of fences for surrounding pastures and livestock. The Europeans were accustomed to seeing a landscape that was essentially unbroken by fences. This characteristic was influenced by the fact that shepherds were used in Europe to watch over livestock which were essentially allowed to roam, a method that many ranchers in areas of the western United States have employed. American pioneers did not have the time to spend in this manner with other important duties to be addressed (Sloane, 1955).

Another factor that influenced the widespread use of fences during this time was the abundance of materials that were available. Whether stone was needed for a wall or wood for a fence, the supply at that time must have seemed endless and it was used abundantly. Early stone walls were built from the material that was locally available, usually originating from the same site. This use of local material served to connect the structure to the underlying geology of the site. The character of these walls differed with the location due to the different characteristics of the materials and the challenge that these materials posed to the techniques of construction (Hough, 1990). In 1883, there were six million miles of wood fence in America valued at almost two billion dollars (Sloane, 1955). This makes a strong argument for the importance of fences in the early American landscape.

The importance of the wall and fence to early Americans has been demonstrated. The result of their wide-range use influenced the character of the landscape. These elements were used to delineate property boundaries and to enclose valuable livestock. In a sense, they symbolize the values that a community or individual places on their property and belongings. Fences and walls are also important due to their direct connection with the available natural resources. The materials, usually either stone or wood, that they were

constructed from were obtained locally, often from the same site. The relevance of this for the assessment method is not only the actual walls and fences, but also the philosophy of exploiting local material and methods to construct them. This is what makes these elements important in the vernacular landscape.

## **Public Space**

The final component of the vernacular landscape that will be discussed is public space. This space can be thought of as any place that accommodates the movement and activities of the entire community population. These places do not have to be owned by a public agency, but they usually are. The importance of these spaces is that they allow the members of the community to contribute to the richness and diversity of social life. Individuals are not excluded based on some preconceived notions. Therefore, the views and attitudes of the community can be fully represented in these spaces.

Public space encompasses a wide range of possibilities. It can be as simple as an abandoned city block or it can be a grand and formal space that is planned into the urban fabric. The plaza, market, town square, and forum are all examples of public space which is “essential to any community” (Jackson, 1984, p. 16). People use these spaces on a regular basis to spend time in the company of others or just to pass the time. Many public spaces are full of action and are given life through the presence of people.

Zucker describes public space in terms of the spatial experience that it offers to a variety of people. To Zucker, public space is a necessary component of the community. It is the opportunities that a public space affords to the members of a community that make its presence so vital (Jackson, 1984).

Jackson agrees that these characteristics of public space are accurate. However, he feels that this description does not adequately reveal the importance of the role of this element. Jackson argues that the “plaza is not just a stage” for the amusement of people (1984, p. 17). It does serve this purpose, but public space is also “a manifestation of the local order.” Public spaces reveal and help to establish “the relationships (among) citizens and between these citizens and the authority of the state” (Jackson, 1984, p. 18).

Jackson describes the traditional public space as a place which “displays a variety of symbols, inscriptions, images, and monuments” (1984, p.18). These characteristics serve two major roles. First, they exist to define the “civic privileges and duties” of the members of the community (Jackson, 1984, p.18). These components of public space symbolize the obligations that residents have to their village or town. Secondly, these elements serve a function similar to that of walls and physical boundaries. They serve to subtly exclude outsiders, or at least remind them that they are not members of the local community. Jackson reminds us that “public space was not for relaxation, it was for *civic* awareness” (1984, p.18).

Quality public spaces have many common characteristics. Typically a public square will occupy one of the most important locations within the fabric of the town. The presence of several significant public buildings surrounding the square serves to emphasize the importance of the location. Other than the physical influence of these buildings, there are social influences on the community as well. Naturally, people will come to the central square for the activities already discussed. Also, people are drawn to the area by personal business that they need to conduct in any of the surrounding buildings. This presents the opportunity for spontaneous interaction with other people, even if their reasons for being there are different. Although, Jackson argues that the “public” nature of these spaces has diminished and that their role within the social structure of the

community has been divorced from the public uses of the buildings surrounding them (Zube, 1970, p. 158).

Public spaces are important to the structure of a small town due to the social interaction that occurs there. These spaces are often thought of as valuable assets to a community. The location of public space within the structure of a town controls, to some extent, how the space influences the town. Public spaces which occupy important locations within the town usually result in prominent features that are often used frequently and have a great impact on the social life of the town. Assessment of town patterns should identify where the important public spaces are located in relation to other important elements of the town.

## **IMPLICATIONS OF LANDSCAPE VERNACULAR**

The vernacular landscape consists of a series of elements which are influenced by the physical and cultural characteristics of a given location. Such physical characteristics as the size, shape, ornamentation, materials, and construction of these elements serve to enhance the sense of place. They help to identify a place as being unique. Subsequent additions of elements which adopt similar physical attributes serve to strengthen this identity.

The above discussion identified four major physical elements which are important features in the vernacular landscape. The assessment of small town form and patterns must account for these elements in order to be accurate. The most important of these elements is the road due to its impact on the arrangement of the other elements. As with the physical forms in the previous section, the effects of these elements should be analyzed in terms of the individual element as well as its physical relationships with the

other elements. These connections are an important component of the structure of small towns.

### **C. TOWNS**

This final section of the literature review focuses on the physical components of traditional small towns. This discussion constitutes the final component which will influence the assessment method of small town form and patterns. The goal of this discussion is to provide some background information about the development of small towns and the increasing population growth that is being experienced in many of these towns. It is this increasing aspiration of many people to live in small towns that justifies the need for a greater understanding of small town patterns.

In order to provide a clear understanding for the following discussion, the term “town”, as it will be used in this thesis, needs to be defined. The definition of a town seems to be as varied as the individuals who debate this issue. Most people would agree that a town consists of a central commercial or economic district surrounded by residential land uses. Another common component of a town is the presence of a local governing body. The presence of these physical components distinguishes a town from traditional rural and agricultural land uses, but these elements alone do not constitute a town. Indeed, these elements can be found in most, if not all American cities. Therefore, the definition of a town becomes an issue of scale. Although the statement that “small towns are smaller” is too ambiguous. It is true that the physical size of the components of small towns; the buildings, streets, and overall area, are smaller than those in a larger city. However, it is the scale of influence on the surroundings that seems to be a major distinguishing characteristic between towns and cities. The physical, economic, and social services provided by a town are generally only utilized by the local residents. The impact of a

town on the economic and social aspects of the larger society are very limited. There seems to be a sense of self-sufficiency associated with towns. That is, the town meets the needs of the surrounding community and it generates the services required to sustain itself. However, beyond this philosophy of supporting itself, a town has few impacts at a regional or national level. Therefore, the term “town” will be used here to describe a relatively small, self-contained community that has the greatest impact at the local level with limited regional economic and social implications.

Traditional small towns are appealing to many people due to the “sense of community” that is commonly associated with them. These towns provide a pedestrian lifestyle among a variety of land uses and building scales. Arendt noted three advantages to small town living that are commonly held by town residents. These include a greater likelihood of establishing relationships and friendships, an increased sense of shared responsibility and support among residents, and a closer relationship with nature through informal outdoor recreational activities (Arendt, 1994).

In the early part of the 1900’s the American population was undergoing a gradual and steady migration from rural to urban areas. The motivations for this movement were both an attraction to city life as well as to the economic opportunities that could be found there. This trend continued until the early 1970’s when the reverse started to occur. Non-metropolitan areas experienced growth as the move began from the cities to small towns and rural areas. This trend seems to have been influenced by quality of life issues as opposed to economic ones. Therefore, the population growth in small towns and rural areas is predicted to continue even in the face of a fluctuating national economy (Tournier, 1983). In support of this theory of population movement, Houstoun cites a 1987 study from Rutgers University that reported that 50% of the people surveyed stated that living in a small town would be “very desirable.” Also in the same survey, only 10% of the respondents felt as strongly about living in a city (1988).

With the interest in small towns currently rising, existing towns have been, and will continue to be, faced with the prospect of rapid change. Also, with this increased appetite for small town life, new developments based on small town patterns are being proposed. Therefore, it becomes important to understand the physical structure of small towns. On the surface this seems to be an obvious pursuit which could be answered very easily, but very often the obvious conclusions can be the most elusive. Therefore, this section will continue by looking at the development of towns and then progress into a discussion of the major categories of physical elements that are commonly found within this type of settlement. The objective is to use the previous discussion of conceptual physical forms to generate an understanding of the roles of these major elements in the structure of the small town .

### **Town Development**

The factors that stimulate the development of a small town influence what physical elements are found there. In the early American landscape, towns were developed as self-sufficient communities. The town provided services and infrastructure to support the surrounding population. More recently, towns have been developed as connecting pieces of a larger metropolitan area. These towns rely heavily on the adjacent urban area for economic and social services. The different levels of reliance result in the presence (or absence) of distinct town elements. These differences will be pursued in the following section.

Towns are usually created in response to one of two factors. These are the pull of exploitable resources and the push outward due to overcrowding (Galantay, 1975). The location of many early American towns was influenced by the surrounding natural resources that were available for use. Today, in the face of overcrowding and the

deterioration of many urban centers, town development is being provided as an option for the growing population. Therefore the primary reason for the development of a town is to provide an alternative growth center. Galantay cites three other types of new town development. These are the formation of satellite towns, independent new towns, and parallel cities (Galantay, 1975).

Satellite towns are “comprehensively planned new communities within the metropolitan area which maintain strong ties with the center city” (Galantay, 1975, p. 53). The distance between the satellite town and urban center on which it depends must be close enough to facilitate rapid commuting between the two but far enough so that the satellite town can establish its own physical identity (Golany, 1976). The important characteristic of these towns is their absolute reliance on the larger metropolitan area for jobs, infrastructure, and social and cultural services. Minimal services are provided locally for the convenience of the residential population. These towns are primarily bedroom communities with a middle-class population that is larger at night (Golany, 1976).

The reverse philosophy is applied to independent town development. These towns are purposely located far from an urban center. They discourage commuting to work and it requires that the job market and urban services are broad enough in scope to support the entire population of the town (Galantay, 1975). These towns serve not to extend the population and the range of urban services from a central area, but to disperse them over a much broader area.

Parallel cities are “new towns of the same order of magnitude as the existing ‘twin’ metropolis” (Galantay, 1975, p. 54). This type of development occurs if the process of contiguous growth outward from the central urban core is prohibitively expensive or impossible due to prominent natural features in the adjacent landscape.

Company towns are “communities which [have] been built wholly to support the operations of a single company” (Golany, 1976, p. 36). The activities and the economy of the company dominate the social and physical character of the town. Two examples of this type of community are the natural resources town and the single-product town.

The natural resources town can be categorized, using Galantay’s terminology, as an independent town. These communities are “developed primarily to exploit the local natural resources and to house the company’s labor force” (Golany, 1976, p. 37). The town is typically built close to the industry and associated factories. The pull of the natural resources and the economic benefits that they provide strongly influence where these towns are developed. Due to the fact that the natural resources that are being harvested have a finite quantity, these towns do not tend to be long-lasting. Also, within the life span of the town there is a high level of transience among its residential population.

Although they are not a traditional “company town”, towns which have arisen to meet the needs of the local agricultural community are related to the natural resources town. These towns were established to provide services and a market for the local farmers who could not afford to spend a long time away from their work in order to travel to get products that they could not produce and to sell those that they could. Many of these towns have been forced to expand the scope of services that they provide to the local community as many small family farms have failed or changed their primary source of income.

Another type of company town, the single-product town, is typically developed as a satellite community to a major urban area. The production of a single product creates a fragile economic base that necessitates a strong reliance on the adjacent, more economically diverse market. The nearby city provides optional employment for the

residents of the single-product town during slow economic times and it also provides market proximity for their product (Golany, 1976).

The development town is an independent entity which is “socially, economically and physically planned with the economic base, social services, public facilities, and other utilities needed to serve the residents” (Golany, 1976, p. 42). These towns, designed to be self-contained communities for low and middle income families, serve as regional economic centers connected to the surrounding agricultural land through a transportation network. These towns are typically developed far from existing communities in order to redistribute the population and to disperse socioeconomic activities (Golany, 1976).

Another type of development known as new towns in-town are “used to revitalize physically and socially blighted sections of a large city through large-scale, staged development that follows a comprehensive plan” (Golany, 1976, p. 44). This type of community provides a wide range of housing and services, but it offers limited employment opportunities for the local residents. The development is usually integrated into the fabric of the city with access to the major transportation network (Golany, 1976).

Therefore, towns can be divided into two broad categories. First, there are towns which are dependent on a larger nearby community for socioeconomic, cultural, and physical services. These towns are not independent from these services but they do exhibit some physical qualities that distinguish them as a community. Due to their economic and social reliance on an adjacent urban area, towns of this nature often lack the presence of a major element. Commonly, these towns do not have a courthouse and the strong sense of government presence. The services of a central governing body are usually provided by the adjacent community. The other category of towns is that of the self-sufficient community located away from a major urban center which meets the needs of the entire population. Due to this independence, there is typically a wider range of physical

elements associated with the expanded services. The most obvious of these features is the increased presence of government buildings. The case examples that will be explored in a later chapter will represent both of these broad categories of towns.

## **PHYSICAL ELEMENTS OF TOWNS**

In order to identify the physical patterns of small towns, the elements that are present must be identified. Many towns have similar physical elements. As a result some guidelines concerning town development have been developed based on these elements. The following section will summarize some of these guidelines and develop several categories of elements which will be incorporated into the town assessment method.

In his analysis of Village form, Houstoun developed a definition of a village based on its physical configuration. He defines a village as being predominantly residential with commercial and public facilities provided at the center of the village. It also has a high density relative to its surroundings from which it is easily distinguished. The final component of his definition is that the arrangement of land uses and mixed densities provide for and encourage pedestrian travel to nearby locations in and around the town (Houstoun, 1988). Arendt provides a series of distinguishing physical features and patterns that are more comprehensive and describe traditional small towns in a more detailed manner. These features are outlined below. (1994, p. 4)

1. compactness and tighter form
2. medium density
3. “downtown” centers with street-edge buildings, mixed uses, gathering places, public buildings, parks, and other open spaces.
4. commercial premises meeting everyday needs (grocery, drugstore, hardware, etc.)

5. residential neighborhoods close to the town center, often with houses abutting commercial premises.
6. civic open spaces within, and rural open spaces at the edges
7. pedestrian-friendly but also automobile accessible
8. streets scaled for typical uses rather than worst case scenarios
9. incremental growth outward from a central core.

The physical components of towns can be broken down into several large categories. These are the street system, commercial or downtown district, public buildings, public open space, and surrounding land uses. All traditional towns will contain all or at least several of these components. It is not uncommon for a town to have a feature that does not fall into one of these discrete categories. Often this unique feature will serve to further strengthen the identity of the community. The growth of towns and the subsequent addition of these elements traditionally has progressed in an incremental manner. This growth tends to be representative of the existing structure and layout of the town. The objective of the following discussion will be to look at these physical features in greater detail and to propose a method that will start to uncover the relationships and transitions between these elements.

## **Center**

Many small towns have a definite center. This place is not only the physical center of town. It also serves as the focus of the community and the activities which occur within the town. Therefore, the town center should be identified due to its importance both as a physical element and for community interaction.

Unwin advises that some parts of a town should be emphasized while others are subordinated. This can be achieved through the creation of a definite center within the

town. The center of town is commonly the site for public buildings and it serves as the focus for the social activities of the community. Another characteristic of the central area is its close physical relationship with the main entrance and major traffic patterns of the town. The vicinity of these elements is an important ordering device within the town's structure. Their relative proximity serves to enhance the importance of each of these elements (Unwin, 1909).

The implication of having a definite town center is that there are both public buildings and public open space located here. As the focus of activities for the surrounding community, the town center is an important component which should be accounted for. The following discussion will focus on the impact of public buildings and public open space on the town structure.

### **Public Buildings**

Public buildings play an important role in the lives of the community members which they serve. They house the traditional government services that small town residents rely on. The courthouse, post office and other buildings which support public services are usually very prominent structures in the town. Most residents of a community use these buildings frequently and their location is well known. Since the function of these buildings is an important one, the impact of these structures on the town landscape can not be overlooked.

Unwin suggests that public buildings should be grouped around central places. This emphasizes the importance of the center and it lessens the contrast of size and scale between the public buildings and surrounding structures. The buildings in the center should contain similar functions so that "their proximity [will] add to the efficiency of one another" (Unwin, 1909, p. 186). Single buildings which are isolated from other call

attention only to themselves. On the other hand, buildings which are grouped together create enclosed places. Unwin argues that this enclosure is critical in order to establish a place with a “sense of completeness” (1909, p. 187). Furthermore, “a person’s position with the town can be described in relation to [this] place” (Cullen, 1961, p. 9).

Many small towns, those which serve as the county seat, were arranged around the courthouse. This dominant public building in the landscape served not only to “bring people and show them a good time, but also as a political institution” (Jackson, 1983, p. 19). In the shadow of the courthouse, locals would often gather to debate political issues or to discuss county affairs. The courthouse also brought residents in from the surrounding areas for legal reasons or to pay their taxes. “This was the hub, the focal point not only of the town but of the surrounding landscape” (Jackson, 1983, p. 21). In these towns, the procedure of determining the layout was fairly straightforward. The real estate speculators would often donate a piece of land at the center of the new town to the community as the location for the courthouse. After this had been established, the town developed around this predetermined center (Jackson, 1983).

There are many different type of courthouse squares that have been developed in the small towns of this country. One of these is known as the Lancaster square. This plan calls for the courthouse to be located at the intersection of two streets. This gives the building a dominant quality as it is approached along one of these paths. Another type of courthouse square that can be found predominantly in the southern United States is known as the Shelbyville plan. This plan, first implemented in Shelbyville, Tennessee in 1819, places the courthouse by itself in a block located either at or near the center of town. This placement of the courthouse allows the building to command the attention that it deserves as a central element without disrupting the continuous fabric of the town (Jackson, 1983).

While the courthouse is definitely the most prominent of the public buildings that exist in the town landscape, there are other buildings which provide public services. Initially the post office occupied a place along the town's main street. Its location on Main Street gave this building a sense of importance in the lives of local residents. This location provided high visibility and relatively easy access for its patrons. The architecture of the post office, while not as grand as that of the courthouse, was also reflective of its importance. In many towns today, the main post office has been moved away from the main street and often outside of the downtown area completely. This can be attributed to the need of the post office to expand and update its facilities, to improve the access for large vehicles which carry mail to and from other locations and for automobile access for residents who live too far away to walk. The prohibitive cost of renovating an aging structure and the lack of space for adequate expansion has forced the post office to move elsewhere. The original post office still remains in many of these downtown areas but its importance has become secondary to that of the more modern building located on the edge of town (Holdsworth, 1985).

While not quite "public" in the traditional sense, the country store of the southern U.S. served as a place for the exchange of goods, as well as the exchange of political and personal opinion and local gossip. Before the courthouse became the traditional center of many communities, the country store fulfilled the need for a focus of community interaction. "In their own communities they were centers of every sort of neighborhood activity. Everything of importance that ever happened either occurred at the store or was reported there immediately" (Clark, 1944, p. 32). The architectural style of these buildings were somewhat distinct from other town buildings. The country store was usually a two story A-frame structure with a square facade. This gives the store an appearance similar to that of many commercial town buildings. However, one major distinction was the addition of a covered porch on the front, not unlike those attached to many rural houses. This porch, during the warmer months, served as the site for the

exchange of ideas and opinions, directed at anyone who would listen. The porch was not built for this purpose however. It has a more practical use for the store. The raised level was often used as a sort of loading dock for the customers and often as a place where one could mount and dismount their horse. Nevertheless, the country store, while privately owned, developed many social features that made it a social fixture in the community (Clark, 1944).

The role of public buildings in small towns is an undeniably important one. Their functions include the provision of common services to all of the local residents. Other than their government related functions, public buildings influence the social patterns of the town by providing a place where local people can meet and discuss important town issues or to spread the latest gossip. The function of these buildings is such an important one that the structure of a small town is influenced by their presence. An important characteristic of a small town that must be accounted for is the physical relationship between the public buildings and the other elements of the town.

### **Public Space**

The public open space areas of a town also play an important role in the community. These places are provided for each member of the community to use. Similar to the public buildings, this open space has a significant impact on the social and physical structure of a town. Often, these places are highly used and familiar to most of the community members. Due to their importance in the lives of these people, their location is a prominent physical feature in the town.

A review of historical precedents can be used to illustrate the importance of public open space in the development of towns in this country. In 1637, the first planned villages occurred in New England. In almost every instance a central open space or common was

reserved. This space became the center of community activity and was the focus of social interaction between local residents. The 1683 plan for Philadelphia incorporated the idea of using a central open space into a larger scale plan. The overall structure of the town was based on a grid system of streets that divided the town into four quadrants. A central square for the entire town as well as one for each of the four sections were incorporated into the plan. In 1733, James Oglethorpe again used the central square as a common element in his plan for Savannah. The basic physical unit of the town consisted of 48 lots grouped around a public open space. These “wards” or blocks were arranged in a grid pattern. The idea was that growth could be accommodated through the addition of these blocks along the edges of the existing town structure (Galantay, 1975). These are only a few of the examples that can be found of the incorporation of a central public space into the town plan. However, they do illustrate how this element has become an important ordering element within the structure of town plans.

Other public places that are not quite so formal or planned occur within small towns in areas around buildings which are commonly frequented by most members of the community. The space around the post office evolved into this type of public open space. Since the post office was a prominent feature in the town landscape, many meetings between acquaintances happened there. Sometimes the meeting was prearranged, although the chance meeting was a common occurrence. Here, as was the case with the country store, locals could catch up on the latest news which spread so efficiently through the people of the town. Unfortunately, for many reasons the post office has lost this characteristic of being a place of informal socializing. This is probably due in some part to the decision to move the post office away from Main Street (Jackson, 1984).

Public open space can be in the form of planned spaces within the structure of the town or they can occur in the areas adjacent to commonly used public buildings. In either case, the importance of these spaces has been demonstrated by their frequent use over the years

in small town plans. The impact of these spaces and their relationship to the surrounding buildings adds to the character and sense of place of a small town.

### **Street System**

In the previous discussion of corridors and roads, the impact of these forms were demonstrated. In small towns the street system is an equally dominant element. Its attributes have a great impact on the character of the town and its sense of place. These impacts need to be analyzed in order to fully understand the nature of the patterns that exist in small towns.

The street system with the town has two major purposes. Obviously, one of these is to provide access from one part of town to another and to accommodate the traffic flows through town (Unwin, 1909). The other function of streets is to provide sites for buildings, both within the town and in the surrounding residential areas. In his study of colonial towns, Galantay identified five categories of towns. These include agro-military settlements, trade centers, regional centers, mining and industrial towns, and new towns. Within these settlements, the grid street pattern is a distinctive feature. The grid system is the simplest method for surveying and land subdivision, it makes record keeping easier, and it allows for easier orientation within the town for those who are not familiar with the surroundings (Galantay, 1975). As was discussed earlier, a large portion of the early American landscape was subdivided into a grid system. So it should come as no surprise that the smaller scale division of land within small towns adopted this method.

The grid street system creates an orderly pattern within the town, both for the placement of buildings and for movement through the area. The resulting physical forms have both positive and negative impacts on the town structure. The main benefit of the grid system is that it provides convenient and efficient blocks that serve as building sites. Another

positive characteristic is that a long straight street leading to a central or terminal feature can add prominence to that feature. Many small towns have the courthouse situated in a similar manner which adds to its perception as the center of importance for the community.

One negative characteristic of this type of street system is that access to the center of town is cumbersome. For this reason, many of the older towns in Europe have a street system of main arteries extending outward from a central point (Unwin, 1909). Another undesirable characteristic of the grid pattern is that it can create a series of views that become visually monotonous. One way to reduce the repetitive nature of the grid system is to provide a terminus along one of the two intersecting streets. Arendt has taken Unwin's ideas on how to achieve this and altered them in response to more modern concerns (Arendt, 1994, p. 50) (Figure 5). While these solutions serve to foreshorten the view of the motorist, they can create navigation problems in areas of higher traffic flow. It is much more difficult to drive through a series of jogs in the road than it is to progress straight through an intersection. The earlier discussion of breaks in the street pattern by Grady Clay provides an example of how altering the alignment of streets can create distinct boundaries and enclosure of the street corridor. But these also created problems for the local residents. Sharp promotes the use of gentle curves terminal vista points for the streets of the town. Another device that can be used is to stagger streets as they approach town squares and other open spaces to prevent views straight through the space (cited in Arendt, 1994). Unwin provides two additional ways of creating interest along the straight streets within the grid. One method involves the varying of building setbacks to enhance the view along the street. This reduces the monotony of a long, straight facade (Unwin, 1909). Vegetation can also be utilized to create variety along the street. Other than the positive aesthetic qualities that are obtained, common themes of vegetation along one street can be used to distinguish it from another street with a different treatment

(Unwin, 1909). However, these methods may not overcome the monotony of a grid street pattern unless they are generously applied.

Within most small towns there exists a “Main Street.” Whether this is actually the name of the road or only a description of its importance is irrelevant. Whatever its name, Main Street is an entity that serves to define a place as a town. The name implies that this is a place of great importance within the community and also economically. Along Main Street there are stores, restaurants, services, and the important public buildings of the town. Each building located along Main Street has its own unique qualities that often reveal a chronology of architectural styles and of economic successes and failures. Protruding out into the corridor of Main Street is a smorgasbord of signs all subtly vying for the attention of the traveler on the street. These signs, while varied, still manage to blend into a unified image along Main Street. While to the casual observer the Main Street in one town may not be easily distinguishable from a number of others, this is often not the case. The physical forms along Main Street evolved over a number of years through the influence of the merchants and the local people. These streets can reveal many things about the people who were so influential in their development.

The character of the streets within the town is often different than that of the surrounding residential roads. Unwin credits this to a difference in the philosophy of the creation of these roads. “When the main roads have been laid down and the main traffic requirements have been provide for, the spaces left between these through roads can be developed more from the point of view of making the best of the sites for the buildings and less from the point of public convenience” (Unwin, 1909, p. 289). It is in these residential areas that the streets usually deviate either slightly or radically from the grid pattern of the downtown. Also, with the reduced emphasis on the efficient and orderly conveyance of traffic, it seems that these areas would be more suited to the street layouts proposed by Arendt and Unwin. The alteration in the path of through streets to create

enclosure would have fewer negative impacts on the flow of traffic and it would establish a series of small places within the neighborhood. Therefore, a hierarchy of streets exists within the town. Their relative importance is based on the use patterns that occur. For example, arterial streets are a more prominent feature in the landscape than are the neighborhood collector streets.

It is apparent that the street system has a significant impact on the structure of a small town. The movement of traffic through the town and the placement of buildings throughout the area are influenced by the patterns of the streets. The character and sense of place of a town are also influenced by the characteristics of the street system. This is due in part to the fact that most of the town is revealed to the observer as they move along them. Therefore, the attributes of the street network must be taken into consideration by an assessment method.

### **Downtown district**

The downtown area is a prominent feature in many small towns. For many people this area is the “town” and the outlying residential and agricultural land is considered a somewhat separate entity. Relative to the surrounding land uses, the downtown is the most densely developed area with street edge buildings covering a large portion of the lot. The downtown district in many towns is characterized by one and one-half to two story buildings that are predominantly for mixed commercial uses. Although a popular arrangement of the downtown buildings in many towns was one where commercial businesses occupy the ground floor and residential space is provided above. However, due to a variety of factors, this arrangement is becoming less common. This is evidenced by the boarded up windows along the vacant upper floors of downtown buildings that can be seen in many towns today.

The typical downtown developed under circumstances that are quite different from today's planning practices. Houstoun notes that "in the absence of zoning to locate the uses of land, the resulting compact, mixed use centers were the product of economic and transportation factors" (1988, p. 14). This "random collision" of practical forces created towns which directly responded to the needs of the local residents. Goods and services were provided not to meet the latest trend but the everyday needs of the community. In a sense the forms of the downtown and the services provided could be thought of as being a type of vernacular response to necessity. As was discussed earlier, vernacular building in the downtown grew out of necessity rather than from preconceived notions about the way the area ought to look. It seems ironic that town preservationists want to destroy these "random" factors of economic change and cultural tradition in order to preserve the town district as if they are frozen in time when, in reality those areas were born from these community based factors.

The commercial function of the town still remains an essential component of the town center, both physically and culturally. Studies have shown that many local residents still rely on the downtown businesses to provide them with everyday goods and services. More than 85% of local residents get food, hardware, banking services, and other 'convenience' items within their own town. Items which are considered major purchases, such as furniture and automobiles, are often bought in other places. Up to 50% of these purchases are made outside of one's own hometown (Leistriz, 1989). This is probably due to the economic reality that these larger and more expensive items are often not bought without careful consideration and 'shopping around' for the best prices. Other than the goods and services that can be found there, the success of the downtown businesses relies on the time that is required for residents to get to the area, both by car and by walking. This convenience is especially important to pedestrian traffic which has a large impact on the economic success of the downtown merchants (Houstoun, 1988).

However, the downtown centers of many towns are facing some tough challenges to their effectiveness and success. Many towns are faced with the realization that it can no longer support multi-storied buildings in the business section (Jackson, 1983). This is due to the fact that the residential possibilities for these spaces have diminished greatly and many businesses, especially those which rely on walk-in traffic to support them, are not attracted to spaces which are not at street level. The possible exception to this would be an office or business which provides a service that does not require frequent visits by their clients. Another factor that is influencing the success of downtown businesses is the infiltration of large discount stores into the surrounding land. While it is often argued that these nation-wide stores destroy all local business, this is only partially correct. This negative impact is only felt by those businesses which offer goods which are in direct competition with the larger store. Due to the lower cost of items which can be provided by the discount store, local store owners lose all but their most loyal customers. However, this soon proves to be not insufficient to avoid severe economic damage and usually closure of the business. One positive aspect of the location of the large commercial outlet is the spillover effect that can increase the business of stores which provide complimentary goods and services. The increased customer traffic that is generated usually equates to an increased volume of customers for businesses such as restaurant and service stations (Gruidl, 1988).

Other than the disruption of the economics of small town businesses, nationwide chains have severe impacts on the traditional form and aesthetic qualities of the downtown. Due to their widespread nature these large stores have, out of necessity, developed standardized building layouts and exterior appearances. While the interior arrangement of the standard building units may vary slightly from store to store, their exteriors usually remain steadfastly consistent with the adopted standards of the company. This gives the store instant recognition to the potential customer passing by on the street. These physical reproductions adhere to the philosophy of the standard image that the company

wishes to project. These national companies are also virtually unwilling to drastically alter the exterior appearance of their stores especially if they have the option of locating them elsewhere. However, there are a few examples of nation-wide chains who have been flexible with this issue and adopted a physical look that is not consistent with the standardized image. But there are many more examples of towns who have relaxed their architectural standards and, in my opinion, compromised the quality of the town aesthetic in order to attract business and generate increased tax revenues.

This standard image is virtually always in conflict with the architectural qualities of the existing town buildings. Traditionally, downtown buildings were constructed to be visually sympathetic to their neighboring structures. While these buildings maintain a sense of individuality through subtle differences with other buildings, they are only a piece of the downtown composition that has become so fondly associated with small towns. The violent contrast in scale and appearance that is introduced by the national, homogenous “architecture” of chain stores can not be described by any of these characteristics.

The downtown or commercial district is an almost universal element of small towns. The characteristics and arrangement of the buildings along with their uses combine to define small towns in the eyes of many people. Initially, the downtown was developed to provide goods and services for the surrounding community. However, in many small towns today, the commercial component has shifted to the edges of town. This new growth often compromises the character of the existing structures. Therefore, the form and patterns of traditional downtowns needs to be determined so that new construction can be incorporated into the existing town fabric.

## **Surrounding Land Uses**

The final category of physical elements that will be presented is the land uses that surround the downtown. As towns have evolved so have the uses of the surrounding land. Initially this area was dominated by agriculture. As discussed earlier, many towns were developed to meet the needs of the agricultural community. Slowly, the agricultural industry has shifted away from the family farm and many small farms have given way to residential land uses. Today, a common arrangement of land uses is residential areas surrounding the downtown with rural and agricultural land in the outlying areas. This arrangement has a significant impact on the town.

There are several impacts of the surrounding land on the structure of a small town. The most notable of these relate to the placement of buildings and building density. It has already been noted that traditional town patterns exhibit the characteristic of decreasing density as one moves away from the downtown district. Along this gradient, the amount of open space increases, although this space is mostly privately owned. This decrease in density serves to make the buildings less dominant on the landscape. The placement of buildings in the residential and rural areas is another important characteristic. Neighborhoods which are adjacent to the downtown typically have a more formal arrangement. The houses often have the same setback from the street and the space between the houses is nearly the same. What results is a consistent rhythm of structures and spaces. Beyond this residential area, the rural landscape is characterized by fewer structures and an increased amount of open space. Also, the placement of the buildings typically are not as formal as those closer to the town. What results from this arrangement is a series of zones which can be identified through an investigation of relative building density and placement.

The residential neighborhoods in small towns possess physical characteristics that influence the character and structure of the town. The placement of buildings and their density serve to create a transition zone between the downtown district and the outlying residential and agricultural land uses. The assessment method should be able to identify how building density and placement influence the structure of a small town.

We have now identified four major categories of physical elements that are present in small towns: the street system, the downtown district, the center and associated public buildings and spaces, and the land surrounding the downtown. Although not every town will have all of these elements, a vast majority will contain most of them. The presence of each of these physical elements has a strong influence on the character and sense of place of a small town. However, the characteristics of the street system and the downtown seem to have the greatest impact. The following chapter will use these four categories as the basis for an assessment method that will begin to uncover the relationships and patterns between these elements in small towns.

### **III. TOWN PATTERNS**

The purpose of this chapter is to present a method that will allow us to begin to uncover the spatial relationships that exist within small towns. The method that is being proposed consists of a series of questions that one could ask about a particular small town of interest. These questions are derived from the literature concerning the important components and characteristics of towns: its sense of place, its landscape vernacular, and its physical components. The answers to these questions will begin to uncover the physical relationships that characterize small towns. The answers to the questions will be somewhat obvious to the user. However, the purpose of the questions is to enable the observer to begin to understand the structure of the town through the investigation of its parts and their physical manifestation in the landscape of the town. The results from the application of this method through the use of case examples can be found in the next chapter of this document.

A town is a recognizable entity that is defined by its physical elements and their arrangement in space. The physical elements of traditional towns are arranged in a manner that creates a unique typology of community. There are two forms of settlement and development that are commonly exhibited in small towns. The first is a pattern of concentric rings that expand from a central core. As these rings of development progress away from the center they are characterized by decreasing density. The second form is linear in nature and is the result of development that is located along one major transportation route (Emrys, 1966). The arrangement of the elements in a small town creates a sense of place and differentiate towns from other types of building patterns, such as urban and suburban. Small towns have a certain vernacular style that results from layers of cultural influences, traditions, and changing technology.

The argument here is that towns are more than just a tree-lined Main Street and a Courthouse. These elements are important to our definition of a town, but it is how these and other important elements are arranged in relation to each other that truly gives a town its definition and character. Unwin states that “the harmony, the unity which binds the buildings (of the town) together and welds the whole into a picture, is so much the most important consideration that it should take precedence” (Unwin, 1909, p. 363). Within this scope of unity there is an opportunity for variety without blatant individualism of one component. The obvious exception to this would be the object(s) that occupy the center of town. Aside from this, within the unifying theme of the town “we can manipulate the nuances of scale and style, of texture and color, and of character and individuality, juxtaposing them to create collective benefits” for the people within the town (Cullen, 1961, p. 12). Therefore, unity within the physical structure of the town does not have to produce monotony. Instead it requires the “proper relation between the different colors and parts” (Unwin, 1909, p. 364).

In his study of European towns, Cullen discovered two processes that occur in small towns. The first is called the “art of relationship”. The function of this relationship is to “take all the elements that of to create the environment . . . and weave them together in such a way that drama is released” (1961, pp. 8). The second process that occurs is termed “serial vision”. The components of serial vision are existing and emerging views. The townscape is resolved by the observer through a series of “revelations.” Therefore, the goal of the town planner would be to manipulate the physical environment of the town in order to create an impact on the emotions of the observer (Cullen, 1961).

The physical objects in small towns are arranged in patterns that create a typology of development. Small towns are recognizable as an entity due to this arrangement of its parts. If the physical components and the patterns of their arrangement were different then the settlement would not be seen as a small town, it would be something different.

Therefore, the components and the patterns of small towns are both important in determining what the important physical relationships of a small town are. Accepting this as true leads to the issue of how these relationships can be determined. The next section will present a method for doing this.

## **ASSESSMENT OF TOWN FORM AND PATTERNS**

The assessment of small towns must account for three characteristics: the sense of place, the landscape vernacular, and the physical components of the town. Each of these three characteristics were explored in detail in the literature review and their importance was documented. The next step is to use this information as a guide for the development of an assessment method. The method that is being proposed is a series of questions that are grouped into categories of physical components. The questions are meant to prompt the observer to discover what characteristics of these elements are present and how they serve to create a sense of place and landscape vernacular for the town.

This method is intended to be used as a component of the design process as a guide for field inventory of small town form. It attempts to give a direction for the study of small towns, or at least serve as a starting point. Probably the best method of using the assessment tool is to devise several routes that can be traveled both on foot and by driving. Several passes should be made along these routes, especially if the observer is not familiar with the town. During these preliminary passes through the town, the observer can begin to get a “feel” for the environment and the relative importance of the physical elements which are present. After this initial investigation of the town, a more in depth analysis can occur. It is doubtful that the structure of a town can be completely comprehended during a brief observation period. The method may require that several trips be made to fully uncover the relationships that exist. This will vary among the

different users and with their familiarity with a particular location. There may also be the need to consult with the local town officials and to review any local literature about the town in order to fully comprehend its structure and the factors that influenced its development.

The method is not supposed to be regarded as providing all of the questions that need to be asked about a particular town. Many towns will have unique qualities that will be discovered during this investigation. For this reason, each section ends with a question that prompts the observer to ask their own relevant questions which should arise during their analysis. Furthermore, the answers to the following questions are not meant to be literally transferred into a new design. Instead, they will highlight the important relationships that serve to create the overall aesthetic and character of the town. These should provide some insight for design decisions relative to this type of settlement and development.

The following questions should be considered when making a site inventory of a small town of interest. The answers should lead the observer through the structure of the town, revealing the relationships that define the character of the town. The answers to the questions can be documented through either photographs, sketches, narrative, or through two and three dimensional study models. This process can be used in order to guide decisions about the physical environment of a single town or it can be used to interpret a series of towns so that larger defining characteristics concerning town structure can be identified and applied in another context.

*Of the town:*

1. What factors influenced the development of the town ? company town, etc.
2. Where is the town located with respect to the major urban centers in the area ?
3. What element(s) served as the point of reference for the orientation of the town during its settlement period ?
4. Has the development of the town progressed uniformly outward in all directions from a defined central location or is the pattern of growth linear ?
5. What influenced this pattern ? Limiting natural features, political influences, cultural issues, others ?
6. Are there any elements that create a consistent “theme” throughout the entire town ? How do you know when you are in the town or not (besides a sign marking the town limits) ?
7. What other characteristics of the town have been discovered during this assessment ? Are there any features that give the town a unique character ?

*Of Streets:*

1. Where is the major regional highway located in relation to the town ? Outside the town limits or running through town ?
2. Where is the major road that leads into town ?
3. Where is the main road/street within the town ?
4. Are these two roads the same ? If not, what elements and/or treatments are used to establish which road is the more dominant path within the town ? What occurs at the intersection of these streets ?
5. What devices are used to establish the hierarchy of streets within and surrounding the town ?

6. What type of street pattern is used in the downtown area ? in the residential area ? If these patterns are different, how is the transition made from one to the other ?
7. What other characteristics about the street system can be identified ?

*Of the downtown:*

1. What elements are used to mark the boundary of the downtown district ? How do you know if you are in the downtown or not ?
2. Where is the downtown district located in relation to the major road(s) in town ? Do they pass through the center of the downtown or do they occur along the edge ?
3. Where are potential conflict points between pedestrians and automobiles ? What solutions, if any, are used to lessen this conflict ?
4. What, if any, changes have been made to the structure of the downtown to accommodate the automobile ? Where are parking areas located with regard to the downtown businesses ?
5. What methods are used to create visual harmony among a variety of buildings ?
6. What buildings occupy the corners at street locations ?
7. What other characteristics have been discovered during this assessment of the downtown ?

*Of public buildings and spaces:*

1. What public buildings are present ?
2. Where are these buildings and places located in relation to the major streets within the town ?
3. Where are they located in relation to the downtown ?
4. Are public buildings and public spaces always located adjacent to each other ?
5. If not, where else are the public open spaces found ?

6. What other features assist in defining the town ?

*Of residential neighborhoods:*

1. What methods are used to create visual harmony among a variety of buildings ? What are the common elements that occur throughout the residential area ?
2. Are there separate districts/neighborhoods within the residential area ? If so, what elements are used to define the district and what marks the boundary or transition between two different neighborhoods ?
3. What routes are provided for pedestrian movement from the neighborhoods to the downtown ? Do these follow the streets or do they create their own network ?
4. What other characteristics are involved in the interaction between the residential neighborhoods and the other parts of the town ? What features are present which signal that the surrounding residential areas are part of the town ?

**Conclusion**

It should be emphasized that the purpose of assessing the physical structure of small towns is not to generate a picture that can be superimposed over any given location. The results of the assessment method should not be applied in this manner. Instead, these results are intended to educate the observer about the influencing factors and the implications of the physical forms that have developed. Furthermore, not all of the patterns that are exhibited in small towns are effective or even applicable solutions when considered in the context of our modern society. Nevertheless, these can also be useful in the process of creating new form by uncovering areas of small towns that need to be adapted to better serve the needs of a community today. The automobile can be used to demonstrate this point. Many towns were developed prior to the invention and

subsequent proliferation of the automobile. In order to accommodate the car, older towns have undergone a process of “retrofitting.” This has been successful in some areas, but more often than not the fabric of the town was disrupted. Investigation into these attempted adaptations can lead to solutions that are effective and consistent with the character of small towns. The assessment process is meant to be interpreted as a tool which will present issues that will challenge the designer to resolve within their proposed plans.

The assessment method is being proposed as a means of protecting the existing character and sense of place in small towns. The primary function of the assessment method is to provide additional information for the planning and design of new development in and around small towns. The challenge to the designer is to incorporate this information into their proposed design. How this information is used will depend on the individual designer. Therefore, the application of the information from the assessment method and the effectiveness of the new design at preserving the existing town character will be somewhat subjective. The judgment of the designer may result in the application of the additional information in an inspirational manner or it may be incorporated into the design in the form of historical or cultural references. Again, the assessment method can not substitute for common sense and accepted design principles, it is meant to be used in conjunction with them.

Other than requiring that the user of the assessment method have an understanding of design principles, there is another limitation to the proposed method. The area that is being used for assessment must correspond to the area of influence for the proposed development. An example would be a proposed regional commercial center that would rely on a large area including several small towns for its customer base. The assessment method would not completely reveal all of the relevant information if it were applied to only one town within this larger area. The characteristics of the entire area would need to

be examined in order to provide a clear understanding of the sense of place, the landscape vernacular, and the physical components that have evolved from the community.

The logical next step is to apply the model to a wide range of specific locations. This would result in a collection of information that would start to reveal the patterns and relationships between the physical elements that have been discussed. A broad base of this information would start to create a physical definition of small towns. This could lead further into the categorization of small town typologies based on their physical form. Therefore, I have selected two small towns in the Piedmont region of North Carolina to use as sites for the application of the assessment tool. These are presented in the next chapter.

#### **IV. CASE EXAMPLES**

Now that an assessment method for town form and patterns has been proposed, the next step is to apply the method. The use of case examples will demonstrate the type of information that can be determined through the application of the proposed assessment method. The term case example will be used here to differentiate between a case study. The examples will provide information about the assessment method rather than providing a comprehensive case study of a particular town. At this point, the objective is to test its effectiveness in generating useful information about small town patterns. The examples will come from two different small towns in the Piedmont region of North Carolina. They will provide examples of the type of information that can be learned through the application of the assessment method. The two towns that will be used are Mebane and Yanceyville. These two towns were selected for several reasons. In order to effectively test the assessment method, some consistency between the selected towns is necessary. Mebane and Yanceyville are located within the same geographic region of the state. Therefore, many factors, such as climate and geography, have had the same relative influence on each location. There are some differences between the two towns. For instance, Mebane is a company town and Yanceyville developed as a county seat. Differences such as these are beneficial to the testing of the assessment method in that their impacts should be uncovered during the assessment.

##### **Mebane**

Mebane was officially established in 1881 as a company town associated with White Furniture Company. The town is located in eastern Alamance County along the Interstate 85 corridor between Greensboro and Raleigh-Durham. This interstate forms part of the “urban crescent” of North Carolina along which most of the growth in the state occurs.

As the cities throughout this area continue to grow, Mebane faces a future of expansion. Using previously defined terminology, Mebane could be called a satellite town. One small city, Burlington, is about ten miles away and three other larger cities are all within a one hour drive. Many people who work in these nearby cities are moving their families to Mebane. Also, with I-85 nearby, many industries are relocating to this area. Many small towns face a similar future of rapid growth. With this being known, Mebane and other towns in this situation will need to formulate a plan to guide them into the future. The proposed assessment method can become part of that process.

U.S. Highway 70 runs in an east-west direction parallel to a Southern Railways line from Greensboro to Durham. The highway and railroad line pass through the middle of Mebane. Within the town limits, Highway 70 is known as Center Street. North Carolina State Highway 119 is a north-south route that also passes through the town. These two highways are the major corridors within the original grid street system of Mebane. From the south, Highway 119 connects I-85 to the east side of the grid pattern. As the 119 corridor enters the town its name changes to Fifth Street. At the intersection of Fifth and Center Streets, the highway 119 corridor follows Center street to the west for three blocks and at Second Street it turns to the north and exits the town. Therefore the major north-south access corridor actually creates two intersections with Center Street, one at Fifth Street and another at Second Street. However, the intersection at Fifth and Center Streets has been developed as the town center.

Many elements which are important to the town are arranged around the Fifth Street-Center Street intersection. The municipal building which houses the town offices is located on the southwest corner. White Furniture Company, around which the town developed, was located on the northwest corner of this intersection. The building still remains in this location but the plant was closed in 1994. To the northwest of the town center the traditional downtown building form begins. Another characteristic of this

intersection that defines it as the town center is that this is the point at which a majority of people “arrive” in the town. When the railroad was used for passenger service, the Mebane railroad station was located at the town center. Although this mode of transportation is no longer provided, the majority of the automobile traffic entering the downtown area passes through this intersection. Therefore the presence of buildings which provide important services to the community and the arrangement of traffic patterns serve to create a town center.

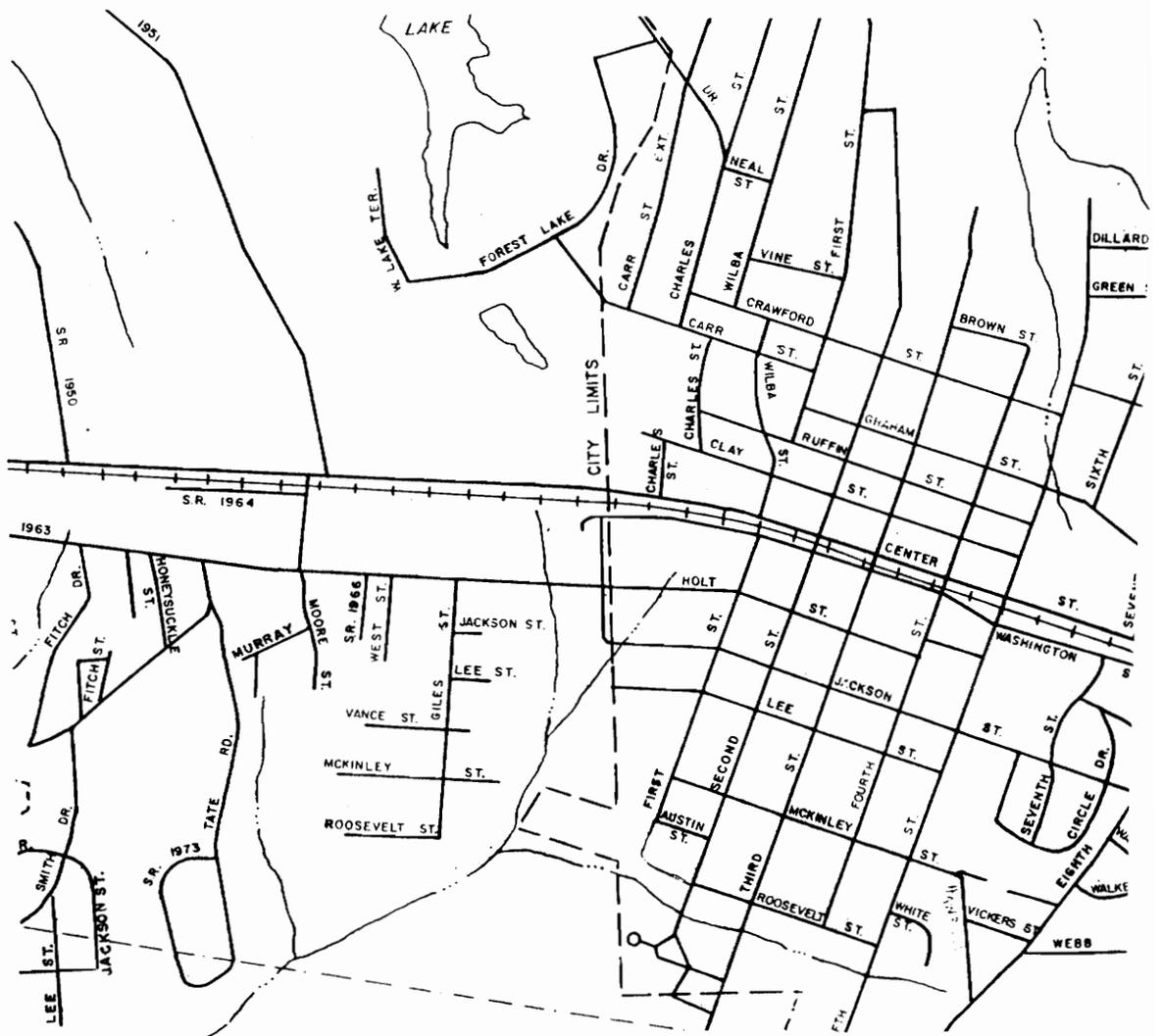


Fig. 1. Map of downtown Mebane and surrounding areas.

Assessment of the street system in Mebane can also reveal important relationships within the town. It was noted earlier that the town street were arranged in a grid pattern with two major highways running through the town. The streets that make up the grid intersect each other at ninety degree angles but the spacing between the streets is not consistent. What results is a series of rectangular blocks of various sizes. Also, the area covered by the grid pattern has a rectangular shape. This deviates somewhat from the traditional grid system containing perfect squares. However, the differences are less obvious when traveling through the town as opposed to looking at the street layout on a map. What is important to note is that the orderly pattern of the grid system serves to define a distinct area in the town. Outside of this area the streets are characterized by gentle curves as opposed to the straight streets of the grid. The orientation of the grid does not seem to have a great influence on the patterns of the surrounding streets. There are only two exceptions to this. One occurs in a residential neighborhood on the northwest side of the downtown. The streets in this area have adopted the same orientation as the grid. The other instance where the influence of the grid can be seen is along Fifth Street on the south side of town. This street extends approximately three quarters of a mile beyond the grid before it varies from this orientation. As one approaches the town from the south along this street, it is where the street becomes straight and aligned with the grid that the traveler begins to feel that they are in Mebane. There is one other characteristic of the street system in Mebane that influences where the boundary of the town is perceived. To explain this characteristic, the terms street and road will be used. The streets in the town are bordered by concrete curb and gutters with a sidewalk directly adjacent to the curb. On the other hand, the roads in the area surrounding the town have no curbs and the sidewalks, when present, are separated from the road by an open grass drainage swale. These characteristics help to provide a distinction between the areas inside of the town and those which are outside of it. Therefore, the alignment, orientation, and the treatment

of the street system can be used to create distinct districts within the town and they can also be used to define the town boundary.

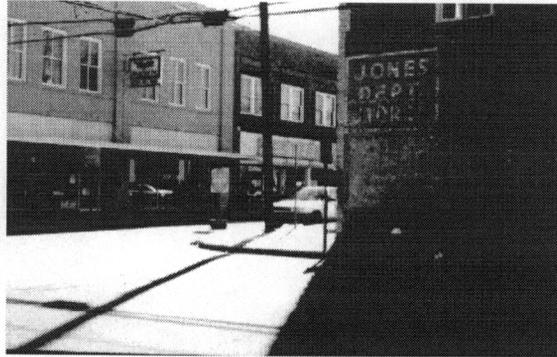


Fig. 2. Mebane downtown district.

When looking at the downtown district of Mebane, the buildings initially appear to blend together as one entity. However, upon closer inspection, there is a great variety of buildings. The heights of the buildings vary between one and two stories. Even though this is a 100% difference in height, the actual ten to twelve foot difference is not great enough to severely disrupt the harmony of the downtown. The window and entrance treatments also vary between the buildings. The height, shape, and style of the windows, especially those along the second floor, are commonly different on adjacent buildings. The entrances into the downtown buildings vary from recessed alcoves to those which are even with the facade. Some entries are covered with awnings, others are not. Even the shape and color of the awnings vary. Each of the signs that mark the individual buildings are as varied as the products and services that are provided. However all of these differences are somewhat subtle. Without stopping to concentrate on these details, they would go by mostly unnoticed. There is one feature that is almost universal to the buildings of downtown Mebane. This feature is a horizontal element that is at a consistent height across the facade of the individual buildings. This horizontal element can be found in the form of a cornice, an awning, or a row of windows. The height and form of these horizontal elements does vary between each building. The harmony among

them is created through the use of this element somewhere on each facade. There are other fairly obvious characteristics that distinguish the downtown form other areas of the town. They are the consistent and narrow setback of the buildings from the street, the placement of the buildings directly adjacent to one another, and the concentrated commercial land uses.

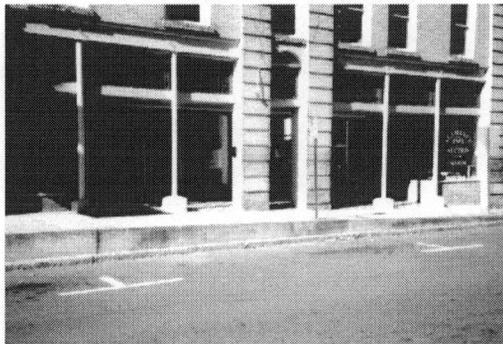
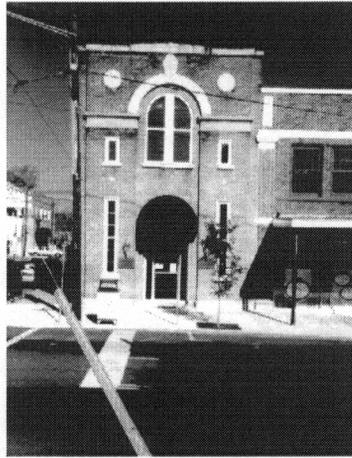


Fig. 3. Horizontal elements shown on downtown buildings.



Fig. 4. Businesses facing Center Street.

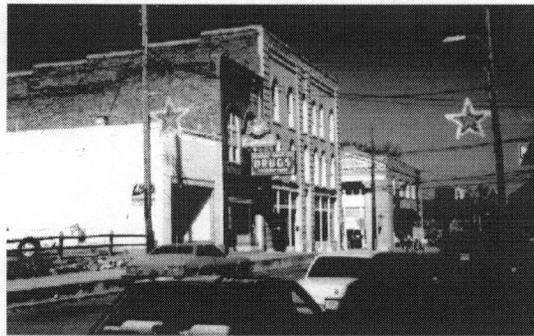


Fig. 5. Diversity of buildings in the downtown

The buildings that make up the downtown district of Mebane have a great variety of characteristics. However, there is a consistent use of form along the building facades that create unity among different buildings. Also, the placement of buildings in relation to the street and to each other serves to create a district that is visually distinct from the adjacent areas of the town. The unity of the various downtown buildings serves to further strengthen this distinction. The assessment method reveals these types of characteristics about downtown areas. It forces the observer to look for these types of physical attributes and to discover how they create a distinct downtown.

There are two traditional public buildings located in Mebane: the municipal building and the post office. Both of these are located along Center Street. As was discussed earlier, the municipal building serves to mark the town center. The post office occupies a prominent and visible location due to placement on Center Street. Even today the post office at this location remains the main post office for the town. These two public buildings provide important services for the community and their locations reflect that importance. However, the post office and municipal building are located on the opposite side of the railroad tracks that bisect the town. This serves to destroy any physical connection between the two.



Fig. 6. Mebane Municipal Building.

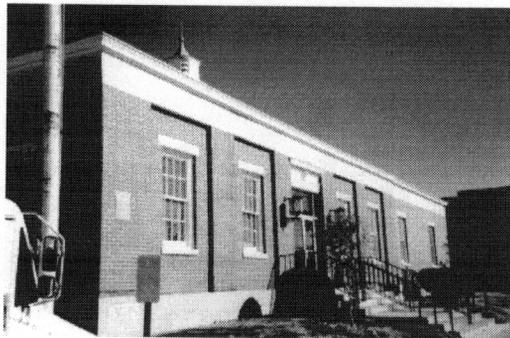


Fig. 7. Mebane Post Office.

Even though the importance of public open space was previously demonstrated, Mebane does not have any of these spaces. Informal social activity is limited to interaction in and

around the public buildings and local businesses. The assessment method reveals that the town is not dominated by the presence of public buildings. The lack of public open space underscores the somewhat private nature of the town. With the exception of the municipal building and the post office, every other space in the downtown area is privately owned. This makes the public building site stand out as unique, but the relationship between these buildings is weak. The only pedestrian access between them crosses the railroad tracks. Therefore, this town does not provide a good example of establishing a strong relationship between public buildings. This is an important characteristic that would have to be determined by applying the assessment method to another location.

The next place that the assessment method leads is to the residential areas surrounding the downtown. Residential areas are present on all sides of downtown Mebane, although this development does not form a continuous ring of housing around the downtown. There are three distinct areas of concentrated development. These are separated by areas characterized by larger open spaces and fewer homes. Within these residential districts the building density is less than that of the downtown but a strong relationship remains between the buildings and the street. The building setbacks in the residential areas are greater than those in the downtown but the element of consistency remains. The consistent setback results in houses that are arranged in a line parallel to the street. This creates a space of open lawn that varies very little in width. The distance between the houses creates a street corridor with a uniform width. However, the space of the corridor does not appear as rigidly defined as that of the downtown streets.



Fig. 8. Consistent setbacks of homes surrounding the downtown.

As with the street patterns, this formal arrangement of residential buildings can be used to define the boundary of the town. The consistent setback of the houses from the street creates this boundary due to the contrast it creates with the surrounding rural areas. In these outlying rural areas, density again decreases and the buildings are not arranged in a formal pattern. Building setbacks vary across a wide range and the orientation of the roads seems to have little impact on the orientation of the buildings.



Fig. 9. Residential neighborhood street adopted from the downtown grid.

Therefore, Mebane can be divided into two distinct areas: the downtown and the residential areas, arranged within the framework of the rural landscape. These areas can be defined by their relative density and the placement of buildings in relation to the street. The assessment method prompts the observer to identify differences such as these and to

discover how the arrangement of physical form is used to define different districts within the town.

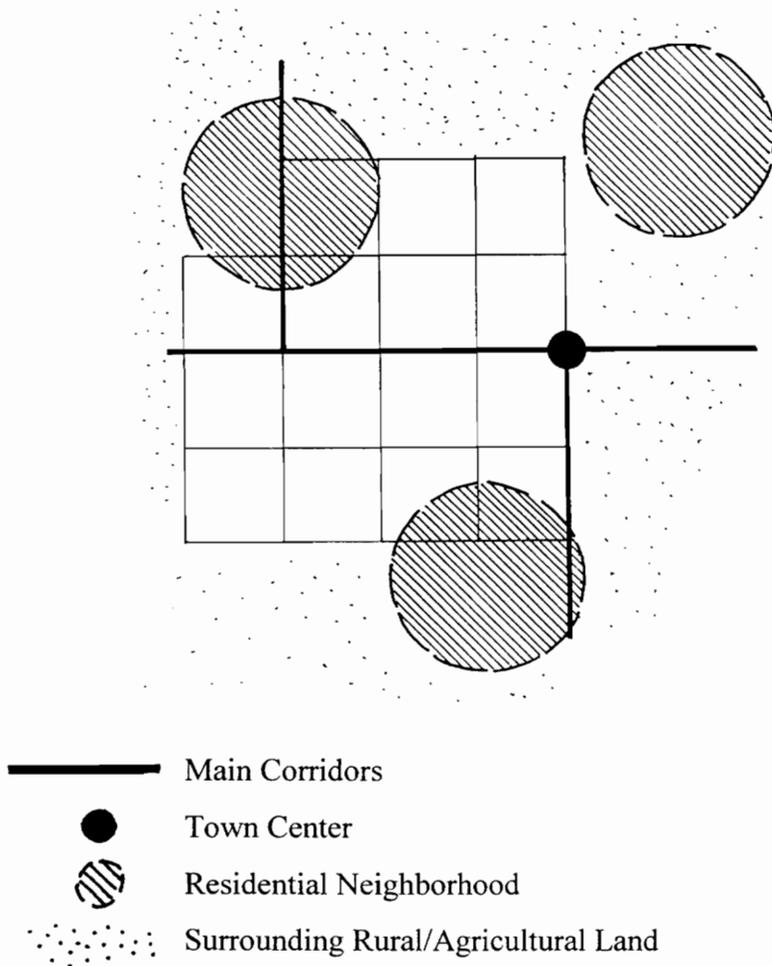


Fig. 10. Conceptual diagram of Mebane.

The town of Mebane can be defined by the physical form and patterns that were discovered through the use of the assessment method. First of all the town is located around the intersection of two important highways. These roads do not bypass around the downtown area. They pass through the middle of the downtown. This makes the downtown businesses highly visible to the daily traffic by routing people through the town even if their destination is elsewhere. Secondly, Mebane has grown outward from a

core of commercial development. The influence of the form and patterns in the downtown diminishes as you move further away from the town center. What results is the creation of distinct zones which have a consistent placement and density of buildings as distinguishing characteristics. All of this information can be compiled into a conceptual diagram that describes the relationship between the important components of the town as determined by the assessment method (See Figure 10).

Once a conceptual understanding of a town is determined, the next step is to apply this information to a design proposal. Even though we do not have an actual development proposal for Mebane, some general statements can be made regarding a few hypothetical examples. The assessment method determined that the location of the town center is at the intersection of Fifth and Center Streets. One of the elements that established this as an important location was the presence of White Furniture Company. It was noted earlier that this business has recently relocated. If the building that once housed the major company for the town is to be replaced, the future occupant of this site should reflect the importance of this location to the town. The new development should have the same community-wide importance as its predecessor. Another example relates to the three distinct areas of residential land uses separated by land with a more rural character. These buffers of rural land between the residential neighborhoods create distinguishable districts of homes. When planning for future residential growth, the town would be wise to maintain this separation. If these zones of residential land uses were allowed to grow together, their individual character would be sacrificed. There are many other examples of how the information from the assessment method could be applied to new growth in Mebane. However, these two examples begin to illustrate how this can be achieved.

## Yanceyville

Yanceyville is the other small town that will provide examples to demonstrate the effectiveness of the proposed assessment method. Yanceyville is the county seat of Caswell County, located along the North Carolina-Virginia border. The town was started in 1791 with the construction of a courthouse. Following this, the downtown district developed around this central feature. Unlike Mebane, Yanceyville is located outside of the “urban crescent” and it remains a predominantly rural area. The county is bisected by several two-lane state highways that lead through a landscape dominated by agriculture. The nearest city, Danville, Virginia is relatively small and about twenty miles away. Therefore, due to its isolation from most major urban areas, Yanceyville could be considered as an independent town. The differences between this town and Mebane will provide an opportunity to see if the proposed assessment method uncovers useful information for various locations.

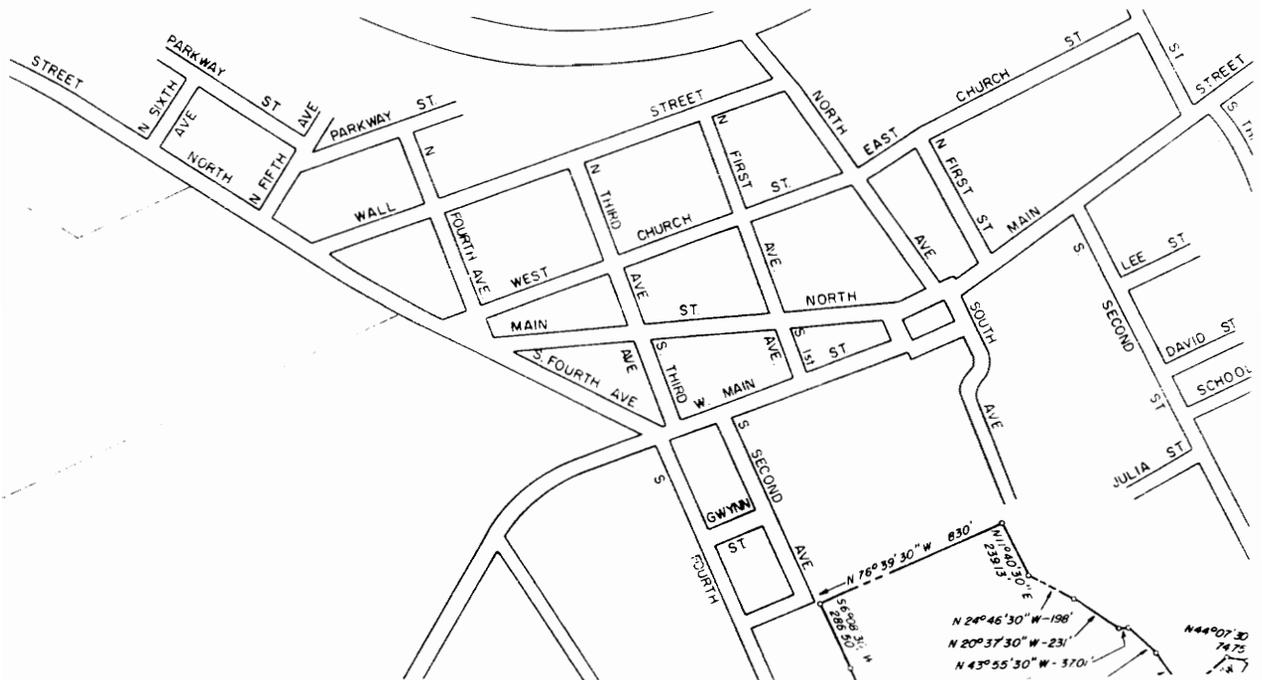


Figure 11. Map of downtown Yanceyville and surrounding areas.

U.S. Highway 158 bisects Caswell County in an east-west direction. It is along this corridor that the town of Yanceyville is located. As with many other towns, the name of this highway changes as it enters the town. In this case, the highway becomes known as Main Street. There are no other major roads that run through the downtown. Main Street is not only important as the primary transportation corridor, it also serves as the spine along which town development has been arranged. The town center, which sits along the major corridor of the town, is a very well defined and strong structural element within the town. The center occurs in the form of a town square bordered by the courthouse on the south and commercial buildings on the other three sides. The location of the town square is marked by the dome of the courthouse that stands well above any surrounding structures. Therefore, the location of the town center is apparent from most areas of Yanceyville. The square itself is a public open space area adorned with statues and monuments to important town events and civic leaders. The grassy open space is separated from the surrounding buildings by streets on all four sides. Therefore, assessment of the overall structure of the town reveals two major elements: Main Street and the town square.



Fig. 12. Yanceyville town square.

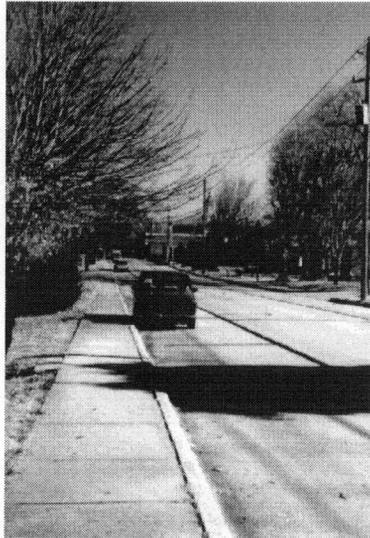


Fig. 13. Courthouse dome in the background marking the town center.

Investigation of the street system reveals that there are three categories of streets within the town. The importance of the first one, Main Street has already been identified. The second category includes the town streets that make up the original grid pattern. The final category includes the secondary rural roads that extend outward from the town. The grid pattern is loosely based on the traditional square form. The exception occurs along Main Street. As this corridor enters the grid pattern from the east, it turns and crosses through the downtown diagonal to the grid. Main Street turns again as it leaves the grid pattern and extends to the northwest. This disrupts the grid pattern somewhat by creating odd shaped blocks. This disruption is magnified by the small size of the overall grid. The sense of consistency and repetition commonly associated with a grid street pattern is lost as a result. The odd shaped blocks that are created are mostly occupied by commercial land uses. The few square blocks are within the surrounding residential neighborhood. Therefore, what results is a characteristic that distinguishes one land use from the other. The irregular blocks and angled street corners of the downtown contrast with the repetitiveness and consistency of the blocks in the neighborhood. Even though the grid pattern is relatively small, there are physical qualities about the street system that reinforce the boundaries between land uses in the town.

Another interesting feature concerning the street system was discovered during the investigation. There are a few examples along the edges of the grid where buildings are used to terminate the view along a straight street. This is similar to Unwin's proposals reviewed in the literature. Instead of a street passing straight through an intersection, it is offset to allow for an object to create a terminus or focal point. While this technique is used in the town, the objects that serve as a focal point have no real significance. The opportunity to add prominence to an important town building is unfortunately lost.

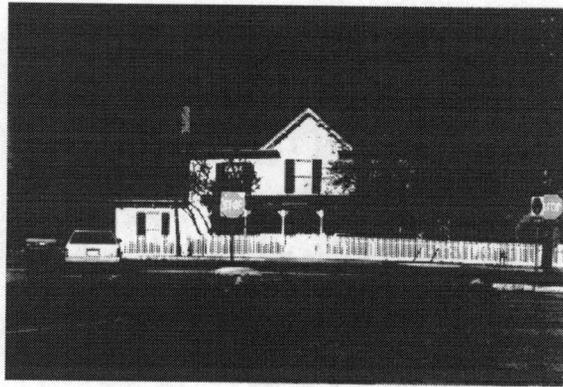


Fig. 14. Building used as a focal point within the grid street pattern.

The next place that the assessment of Yanceyville will focus on is the downtown. This area of the town is extremely small, occupying approximately three blocks. The buildings that make up the downtown are predominantly one story. Other than this consistent height, there are very few similarities between buildings. There is a conglomeration of materials and facade treatments. What is lacking is a consistent element that gives visual order to the downtown. One feature that serves to strengthen the sense of place of the downtown is the presence of the town square. The square is a memorable element that adds to the relative importance of the surrounding commercial buildings. As opposed to a downtown district which blends together as one entity, the downtown of Yanceyville boldly presents itself as a collection of strongly independent structures.

Outside of the downtown of Yanceyville, there is a small residential neighborhood that lies immediately to the north. The remaining area is dominated by large, privately owned tracts of land. The neighborhood is arranged along the strong linear element of Main Street. This connection gives some sense of identity and order to this area. Like the downtown, its small, concentrated nature serves to give definition to the neighborhood. Even though the downtown and the residential area are small, their proximity helps to strengthen each district. The residential area is too small to be able to stand alone as a

structuring element. Due to the limited area of the traditional neighborhood, the rural character of the surrounding landscape has a significant impact on the town. In some cases, these areas can be seen from points within the downtown. This gives the town a strong connection to the landscape from which it arose. Instead of the town growing in all directions and consuming the agricultural landscape, it has allowed the surroundings to become an integral part of the town structure.



Fig. 15. Residential neighborhood along Main Street.

The importance of the courthouse as a public building and as a strong physical structuring device have been mentioned. Other than being a prominent structure that announces the location of the town center, its visibility signals to the community that there is a central authority which provides for their needs. In stark contrast to this philosophy of providing service to the community, the post office is located on the edge of the downtown district and one block south of Main Street. The importance of this building and the services which it provides seems diminished due to its location. The final truly public element in the town is the town square. This space has the opportunity to serve as a gathering place for community and individual activities. The square is probably not being utilized to its full advantage, but its location is appropriate for the focus of community social activity.

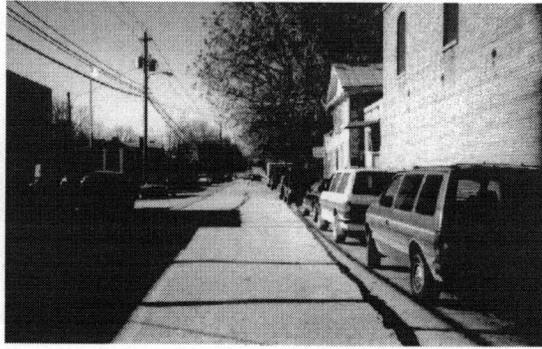


Fig. 16. Location of the post office behind the downtown district marked only by the traditional presence of the American flag.

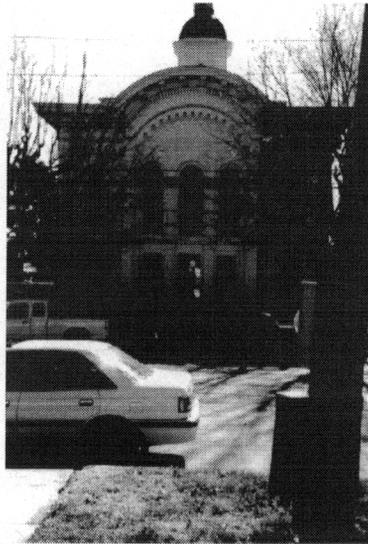


Fig. 17. Courthouse to the south of the town square.

Yanceyville is a very small town located in a rural region of North Carolina. It has, in a sense, been bypassed by the tremendous amount of growth that is being experienced in other locations. It is unlikely that this will drastically change in the near future. However, the town structure does provide some examples that are worthwhile to study. It

demonstrates how the central town square and the Main Street corridor have been developed as strong structuring elements that have impacted town growth. Due to the small size of the town, the information that the assessment tool can provide is somewhat limited but nevertheless valuable. The conceptual diagram below outlines what information has been uncovered during the assessment.

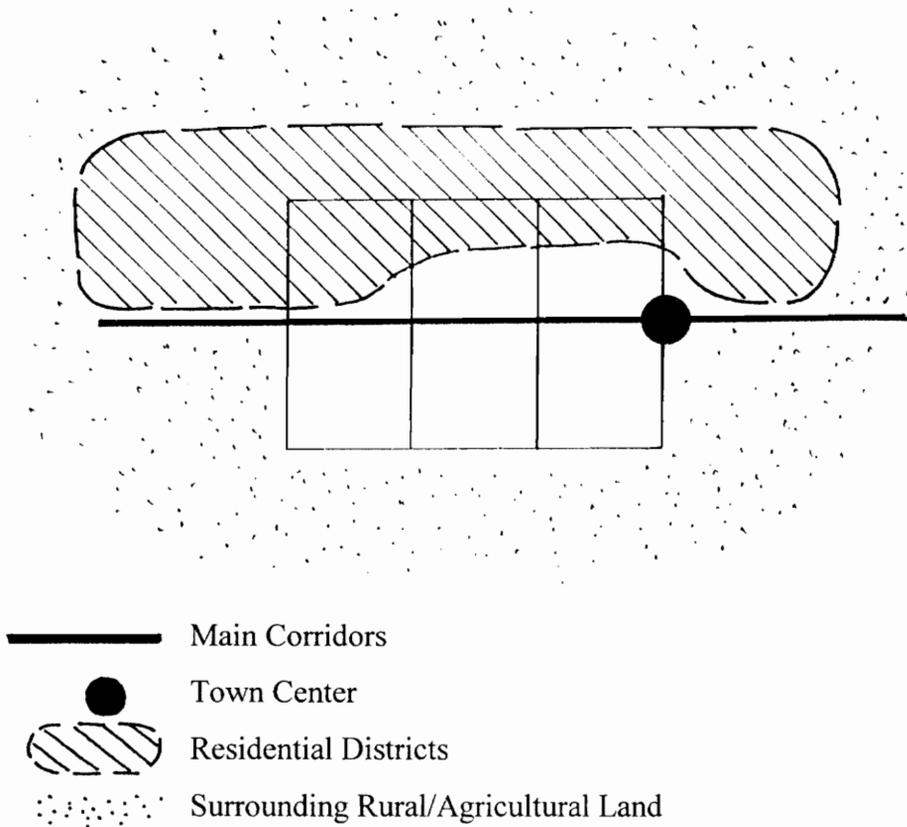


Fig 18. Conceptual Diagram of Yanceyville.

As with the case study of Mebane, the assessment of Yanceyville provides information that can be incorporated into future development proposals. Due to its relative isolation from a major urban center, the agricultural landscape has been maintained in an unbroken band surrounding the town. Indeed, this land use is directly adjacent to the downtown.

This feature creates a definite character or “feel” for the town. This character has been preserved through the concentration of residential development in a band to the north of Main Street. Therefore, town planners should look carefully at the considerable impact the surrounding landscape has on the town. Haphazard growth would destroy the character of the town. Instead, controlled growth centered around existing development would assist in the preservation of Yanceyville’s character and sense of place.

The purpose of these case examples is illustrate the type of information that can be generated through the use of the assessment method. The method seems to be effective at identifying the major structural elements within a small town and the patterns that are formed by the location of these elements. The conceptual diagrams illustrate the type of information and the level of detail that can be determined by using this method. These diagrams should not be considered as the only definitions of physical form in each of these towns. They can be useful only when applied in addition to previous knowledge about a particular town, past experience, and solid design principles. The method must be considered as a tool which can be implemented in the appropriate situation rather than a substitute for a common sense approach.

## V. CONCLUSION

This thesis has presented three characteristics of small towns that must be identified in order to fully understand the small town. These are its sense of place, its landscape vernacular, and its physical components. The physical forms and objects that are found in the landscape have a profound influence on and are influenced by their setting. These forms and objects can be arranged in space to create distinct places. This arrangement has a significant impact on our experiences in a place or our sense of place. Experiences in a place are a very important characteristic of any location. Furthermore, the creation of these forms and objects in response to the socioeconomic and biotic factors of a particular location results in a landscape vernacular. This is a landscape composed of elements that are directly connected to their location. Therefore, vernacular landscapes in different locations can be as varied and diverse as their respective setting. In the context of small towns, these three characteristics play a large role in its definition.

Small towns were once a way of life for most people in early America. For many years following the initial settlement of this country, agriculture was a very dominant component of the national and local economies. These labors provided many families with their only means of income. The suitability of land for agricultural purposes also played a large part in determining where settlement and subsequent migration to better land occurred. During this period, small towns were developed in order to provide a market where local farmers could buy and sell goods. However, a trend developed around the turn of this century that involved a shift away from small town life and towards an urban one. Small towns and the values held by small town people were abandoned and often ridiculed as being stagnant or “backwards.” Cities were seen as cultured places for progressive people and attitudes, all of the things that small towns were not. In recent decades, these attitudes have once again shifted. Small towns are

becoming more appealing. Americans are shedding the social baggage that accompanies urban life in search of a simpler life in rural areas.

There are many differences between small towns of today and their predecessors. Two major distinctions are the presence of the automobile and the absence of the agricultural society that once supported the town. The vast majority of rural and small town residents have adopted new ways of earning a living. Economic and other support for small towns is now provided by a more diverse population who still desire to live by the same values that have long been associated with this way of life. The trend of population growth in rural areas is expected to continue. This growth will be predominantly in the portion of the population who are financially capable of maintaining this lifestyle. The automobile, in part, makes this possible. It gives people the ability to travel over considerable distances between their home and office, reducing the necessity of living near their place of work.

With this new growth in population comes the need to provide additional services to support them. Existing towns will face an influx of people and new businesses which must be planned for. New residential developments are being proposed which resemble the form of small towns. With all of this new growth, where do we look to provide a context within which additional physical form can be created? Some of the answers to this question lie in the physical structure of existing small towns. What is being proposed here is a method of assessing small town patterns and relationships between the major physical components.

In a larger context, the analysis of existing town form demonstrates the importance of providing a context for design decisions. More specifically, it gives designers and planners a tool which can be used to guide the expansion of existing towns or the creation of entirely new ones. Following the case studies that were presented earlier, it is apparent

that the assessment method, as it stands now, is more effective at generating information that could be used to accommodate growth in an existing town. The factors that influence the creation of a completely new town seem to be too complex and too numerous for the proposed assessment method to provide valid and useful information. However, I feel that if this method is applied to a much broader range of existing towns that its effectiveness as a tool for designers and planners of new communities would be enhanced.

Decisions regarding new growth within an existing town will be influenced by a wide range of factors, but if this growth is to be based on the small town typology, it seems logical that the comprehension of its physical form is required. The assessment method that is being proposed is not complicated or necessarily ground-breaking. It does however, force the observer to look carefully at the particular town(s) of interest and determine what physical relationships are present. This should serve as a catalyst for the investigation into the town structure. What will result is a definition of the town based on its physical characteristics. The major argument that this document has tried to make is that in order to build upon the richness and diversity that exists within a town, physical design and planning of small towns should be derived, at least in part, from this definition. However, the proposed method is not a panacea for accommodating small town growth. It is simply a tool that can be used by competent and informed designers. The information that this method is able to provide is important, but it should be considered as an additional layer that can be used to make informed design decisions.

Beyond the design profession and the creation of small town form, there are other implications of this thesis. In today's society, technology is essentially making the world smaller and more accessible. The range of influence on a particular location is rapidly expanding. What is resulting is a loss of character and diversity of places: homogeneity. With the availability of information and products increasing, places are losing their

distinctiveness. Instead of growth responding to local factors, it has often become the result of international influences. The quest for standardization has been driven by our desire for immediate results. The growth of available information and the exchange of ideas across international boundaries has the potential to positively contribute to our society, but the negative consequences associated with the broadening of our society must be realized. A way to begin to deal with these consequences is through education, not only in the university setting, but throughout society. We must be able to advance our society as a whole without sacrificing the individual things that create a rich and satisfying culture. This thesis has tried to demonstrate how this can be done in the context of small town design. Future decisions that are to be made, whether design related or not, will be influenced by national and international factors. but if these decisions are not applied within the context of local factors, we will be losing the characteristic of individuality and anonymity will be soon to follow.

The answer to the problem of nationwide homogeneity is not provided in this document. However, the issue of how to generate knowledge about a given location has been presented. It has tried to demonstrate that the answers are often right under our noses, we just have to take the time to look for them.

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