



PLANNING FOR FAMILY-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES: OVERVIEW

LINKING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND CHILD CARE RESEARCH PROJECT

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Planning for Family-Friendly Communities: Issues and Opportunities

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, the planning profession has given inadequate attention to the specific needs of families within our communities, particularly families with young children. However, cities and counties across the United States have begun implementing policies and practices in areas such as childcare, parks and recreation, housing and transportation that are aimed at involving families in fuller participation with their communities, while designing public spaces that address their needs and desires. These actions can provide an important opportunity for a more-inclusive discussion in planning about the needs of this small but important part of the population. This report is intended to give practicing planners the background, information and tools to guide the implementation of family-friendly initiatives within their communities.

DEFINING "FAMILY-FRIENDLY"

Richard Florida's (2002) idea of the creative economy has become a popular strategy in city planning. Creative workers are the backbone of many regional economies, and planners are giving attention to the quality of life amenities, and openness to diversity that attracts and retains young professionals. Although Florida (2005) cites examples of creative cities that are also family-friendly (Portland, Seattle, Minneapolis, New York City, San Francisco), much new development focuses primarily on young, single professionals.

However, a recent nationwide survey conducted by the American Planning Association and Cornell University revealed that planners maintain an overwhelmingly positive attitude toward the role of families with children in communities. A large majority of planners believe that families are important components of community diversity and sustainability (97%), that

families have a large potential for community reinvestment (78%), are a valuable consumer population (97%), and that communities planned for the entire life cycle are more vibrant (90%) (Israel and Warner, 2008).

Planners can use planning tools to develop family-friendly amenities in their communities. Transportation planning can consider trip-chaining for the needs of parents, and incorporating safe routes to school. Housing policies can focus on affordability and variety, ensuring a diversity of size and tenure options and design that facilitate neighborhood interaction. Parks and open space can promote socialization and neighborhood interaction, as well as a healthy lifestyle for both parents and children. The traditional process of participation can be altered to accommodate the busy lifestyles of families. Comprehensive plans that articulate the needs of families with children in their goals and vision statements facilitate implementation of family-friendly programs and policies. To understand what families with children need, special effort must be made to ensure their participation in the planning process.

Many of the planning tools that can be used to develop family-friendly communities will also help the elderly. The needs of families and the elderly, especially as they relate to walkability, public transit, affordable housing, conveniently located services, parks, and opportunities for civic engagement, are very similar (Kihl et al. 2005; Kochera et al. 2005). Of the 944 planners surveyed in the 2008 APA/Cornell survey, 64% agree that the needs of families are similar to the needs of the elderly in terms of the physical environment. However, NIMBYism, lack of voice of young families, developer-driven interests, and insufficient political support were cited as major

barriers encountered by planners trying to promote family-friendly planning.

Given the valuable economic and social contributions to communities made by both families and the elderly, greater consideration of their needs has become increasingly important. Planners have both the tools and the capacity to ensure these needs are met. The issue briefs and case studies included here will provide insights and tools for successful planning for family-friendly communities. Families with young children in the US work longer hours, feel more stress, and enjoy fewer social supports than families in Canada or Europe (Gornick and Meyers 2003, Harrington 1999, Halpern and Murphy 2004). This is in part because of the strong respect for privacy in family matters in the United States as well as the more limited concept of public responsibility for child development (Harrington, 1999). Greater public attention to family needs can help reduce stress and give parents more time to spend with their children. Planners can play a critical role in designing communities more supportive of families.

DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

Valuing Families in Our Communities

The last few years have focused a spotlight on the needs of young singles in society, and their contributions to dynamic neighborhoods, such as creativity, innovation and economic vitality. This has been much of the focus of Richard Florida's (2002, 2005) work on the creative class. Recent demographic trends, however, also expose a need to refocus our lens, and examine the role of families and youth in creating vibrant neighborhoods. Today's families are changing in composition and articulating new preferences and lifestyle choices, raising new questions for planners.

Embracing Today's Diverse Families

Demographic trends point to a wide spectrum of family types. Today's families no longer fit the traditional homogenous mold of the past: a male breadwinner, female homemaker and 2 or more children. Recent data from the American Community Survey (2006) show that families with children under 18 have become a minority, making up only about 34% of all households. Among all households, 23% are married couples with children and 11% are single-parents with children. 27% are married couples without children and 6% are

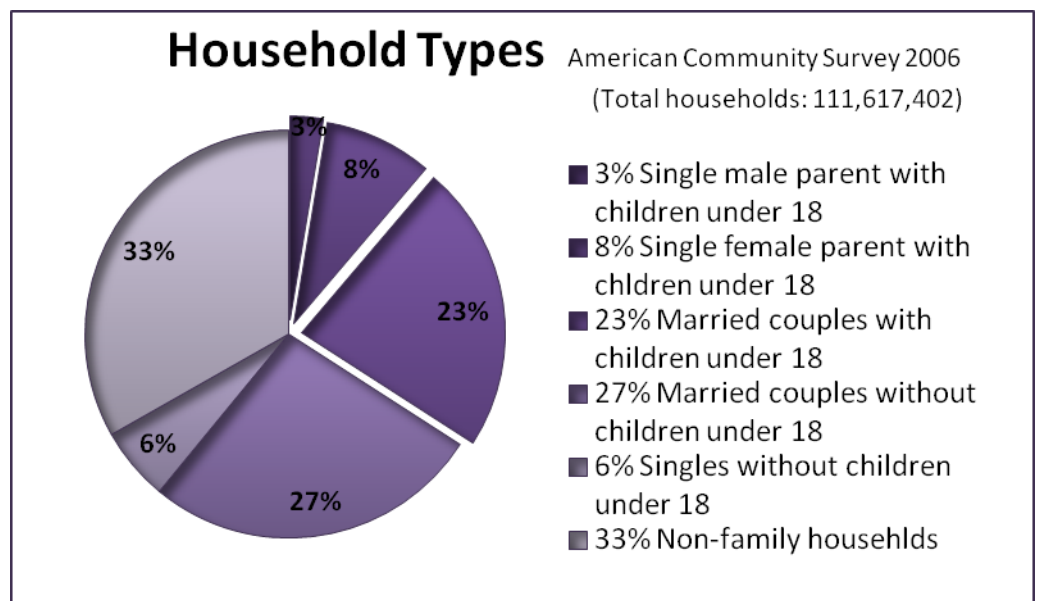
singles without children. Sixty-six percent of all households do not have any children under 18.

Families of today are more ethnically diverse than in the past. Asians and Hispanics are the two fastest growing population groups. Hispanics, in particular, are now the largest minority accounting for 15% of the population. Hispanic households tend to be larger than the national average, and household income tends to be lower. In general, children in ethnic families are also more likely to live in a household with a grandparent, extending the nuclear family (US Census, 2008). Most rapidly growing cities in the South and West have experienced significant increases in the number of Hispanic families with children (Frey and Berube, 2007). Immigrants and their families will play more important roles in the workforce as baby boomers retire. Investing in young families is thus critical to America's future (Myers, 2007).

The Baby Boomer generation (76.1 million people) is different than its predecessors (Baby Boomer Caretaker.com, 2008). This generation is more active and educated than past empty nesters and retirees. Baby boomers are seeking to maintain a higher quality-of-life for years to come, with a commitment to lifelong education and health, as well as a strong attachment to place (Kochera et al 2005). As baby boomers age, fewer households have children under 18 at home. The percentage of families with their own children living at home decreased to 46 percent in 2008, from 52 percent in 1950 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

Sustainability for Families

In 2006, 17.7 million households were paying more than half of their incomes for housing, and that number is increasing (Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2008). The rising costs of transportation, congestion and



energy are a growing concern. New research from the Center for Neighborhood Technology spanning 52 metropolitan areas and 60 million households showed that people living -in cities and inner ring suburbs - with closer proximity to transit, employment, schools and retail spend up to \$2,100 less annually on gasoline than residents of outer ring suburbs, where homes and amenities are generally more spread out and require more driving.

Environmental and economic realities convey a critical need for families to reevaluate their living options. Families who fled to the suburbs are now reevaluating their neighborhoods and living choices. They are beginning to see the value of living in “human-scale” communities, where they can walk to a park or to a supermarket, saving energy, money and valuable time. Communities such as these are often found in more central urban areas. A 2006 Yankelovich survey found, that young married couples with children are as open to moving to urban neighborhoods close to downtown (51 percent), as to small towns (52 percent), or far-off suburbs (54 percent) (Florida, 2008).

Changing Preferences, Needs and Culture

Diverse family types express different lifestyle preferences. Planners need to think about the implications of the changing composition of families, as well as other demographic and economic trends. Some families are shrinking, but others are growing. How can planners accommodate the lifestyle preferences of both smaller and extended families? How can different housing types and tenures benefit different segments of the population? Is it possible for cities to provide better childcare, more efficient transportation and help busy parents save time and money?

One challenge for planners is to build a sense of community among diverse populations. Different cultural perspectives can challenge community development and cohesion, but can also create a richer more dynamic community life and reinforce shared goals. For example, Hispanics are more prone to use public space for recreation and visiting and thus can revitalize streets, parks and plazas with more public life (Schaller and Modan 2005). Family and youth participation can promote greater community engagement, a higher quality of life and local economic growth. Though diverse, families share a need for affordable housing, efficient transportation and reliable childcare, lifelong education, recreation and healthcare. There is a growing consensus that planners need to better envision how communities can respond to these changing preferences and needs.

Livable Communities

Planners must reinvent communities to respond to changing cultural preferences, lifestyles and needs. Planners must consider the various needs of more

diverse families, including immigrants, youth and a significant aging population. These segments of the population may have more in common than previously acknowledged and can inspire a new vision for future place-making.

How can we create communities that respond to the needs of diverse families in a sustainable fashion? *Beyond 50.5*, a recent AARP report, proposes the notion of “livable communities”, envisioning thoughtful community design that enhances mobility and community engagement in order to raise the quality of life of residents of all ages. Some basic amenities communities can offer are cultural outlets, efficient transit, healthcare, lifelong educational opportunities, childcare and walkable, contiguous open space (Kochera, et al, 2005).

Planners need to be resourceful to bring the most appropriate models, technologies and policies into the mainstream. It also requires thinking outside the box and imagining how to create inclusive and flexible communities that welcome and embrace diversity. Though families are heterogeneous, they don’t have to be fragmented. They can be partners in creating better neighborhoods and building community pride. Planners can assist in creating a sense of community ownership by empowering families to participate in planning for their community’s future.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The movement of families into a community has significant economic implications for the local economy. Families can produce significant economic gains from both the jobs they take (and then create) and the money they spend. A study of migration data by the Praxis Strategy Group found that the “strongest job growth has consistently taken place in those regions – such as Houston, Dallas, Charlotte and Raleigh-Durham – with the largest net in-migration of young, educated families ranging from their mid-20s to mid-40s” (Kotkin, 2007). According to the US Census, married people with children are “twice as likely to be in the top 20% of income earners... and [their] incomes [have] been rising considerably faster than the national average.” BLS statistics confirm this: in 2007, husbands and wives with children spent \$68,354 as compared to \$35,491 for single parents with at least one child and \$33,997 for single persons. Families contribute significantly to the local economic base. Their purchases are for local services and their expenditures re-circulate in the local economy creating a stimulus effect.

The communities they move into, however, face decidedly mixed economic impacts (Adler, 2002). The in-migration of families can shift demand levels for local goods and services such as housing and childcare. These industries help build the local economy, keeping expenditure dollars local, while also

providing the social infrastructure needed for economic development. However, the private market often requires public support – for both planning and provision purposes - to ensure a socially optimal supply is present. Failure to meet such demand levels can have negative repercussions on both the labor force and on the quality of local services, especially for young children (Warner, 2006).

Although families create increased demands for high-cost public goods: schools, parks, police, and transportation; studies have shown that families can produce overall net gains to a local community's tax base (Juergensmeyer, 2007).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PLANNING

The Role of Planners

Cities are community builders. The “community building” challenge of planners is to bring different groups together to identify common interests, solve problems and participate in decision-making (Frug, 1999). We approach family-friendly communities from the viewpoint of community building. How can communities serve all members, from young single professionals to families with children, to the elderly? To promote family-friendly communities, planners design physical facilities like affordable housing units, convenient routes to schools, and parks and recreation centers. Planners must act as mediators to resolve conflicts, challenge NIMBY opposition, and foster active community participation (Forester and Krumholz, 1990; Berke et al., 2006). In this research, we explore five arenas where planners can have a positive influence on the creation of family-friendly communities, and we present case studies of successful communities:

1. Comprehensive planning: Prioritizing strategies for family-friendly communities through a comprehensive plan is critical to ensure they are included in development priorities. When planners include family-oriented considerations in their goals, objectives and vision statements, it is more likely concrete projects will be included in recommendations and action plans.

2. Housing: Through zoning ordinances, planners can promote diverse family-oriented housing – affordable housing, multi- and family-sized housing, and accessory apartments. Zoning and site plan review can ensure new units or renovation of existing units meet the needs of residents with children. Childcare services in residences or accessory apartments for the elderly can be made exempt from the permitting process.

3. Transportation: Transportation can become more family-oriented by considering trip-chaining needs of parents, promoting alternatives to privately-owned vehicles, and promoting walkability. Improving mobility and accessibility for children and the elderly involves

public transportation, van pools, street design with bicycle routes, sidewalks and pedestrian friendly roads to schools and services.

4. Parks and Open space: Planners can meet the need for parks and recreation that families desire. Small parks scattered throughout a community enable children and parents to get exercise, enjoy nature and develop an early sense of environmental stewardship within a short walking distance from their homes. Recreation programs can reduce juvenile delinquency and promote a higher quality of life for the elderly.

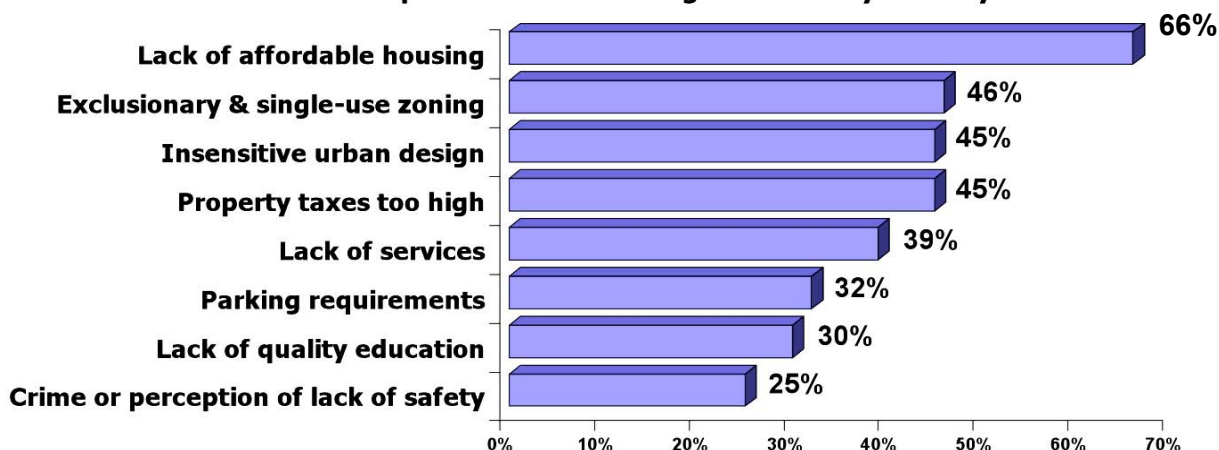
5. Participatory process: To plan for family-friendly communities, families' voices need to be heard. The increasing importance of the planner's role as mediator is directly linked to the need for more family and youth involvement in planning, visioning, and implementation processes.

Barriers to Implementation of Family-Friendly Policies

The 2008 American Planning Association/Cornell University survey indicated that a primary concern in planning for family-friendly cities is overcoming political challenges such as lack of voice for families (65%), insufficient political interest (63%), and lack of community interest (57%). Interestingly, those communities that branded themselves as family-friendly (40%) faced more resistance and political negativity towards family-friendly initiatives than those that did not. As planners turned their words into action, this led to resistance by concerned residents to initiatives like the building of recreation centers, public libraries, neighborhood grocery stores and affordable or multi-family housing. Ultimately, however, communities have been able to overcome this resistance because they are able to engage youth and families in the planning process. The survey found family-friendly communities more successful than non-branded communities in implementing family-sized affordable housing, transit-oriented development, child care, and neighbor-centered design guidelines. (Israel and Warner, 2008)

The most widely-voiced political concern, however, was that of NIMBYism (71%). Families with children are sometimes viewed as a NIMBY issue in communities due to differences in lifestyles and service needs. Residents without children may feel the tax costs of services such as schools and recreation are too high. We must begin to view families for their positive contributions to social capital, community engagement and the local economy. The challenge for planners and government officials is to re-frame the needs of families as valuable to communities, and engage citizens of all ages to participate in the processes that govern their lives. Busy parents with small children, elderly with

Which barriers currently exist in your community that prevent it from being more family friendly?



limited transportation options, teenagers and other constituencies all face obstacles to participation.

Other barriers to implementation of family friendly policies identified in the APA/Cornell survey related to regulatory barriers, finances and development pressures. Surprisingly, 56% of planners surveyed indicated that they were unaware of what is required to begin family-friendly initiatives, and we hope this set of issue briefs will address that information gap.

Concerns over funding will similarly be addressed in the respective issue briefs and subsequent case studies.

METHODOLOGY

The succeeding issue briefs will address areas for implementation of family-friendly policies in a more in-depth way, and will be followed by case studies presenting how such initiatives have been implemented in a variety of communities throughout the United States. The issues and communities presented were selected based on responses to the March 2008 APA/Cornell survey “Planning for Family Friendly Communities,” and we followed up with additional interviews with planners in those communities. They were asked a series of questions regarding family-friendliness, initiatives recently implemented in their community, challenges to implementation, funding sources and lessons learned. These issue briefs and case studies are intended to provide practicing planners with a resource for planning and implementing family-friendly initiatives within their own communities.

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