

Honoring an



WIKICOMMONS



Urbanist

The work of Jane Jacobs and what it means to parking.

By L. Dennis Burns, CAPP

On a recent project trip to Boise, Idaho, I was invited to wait in the conference room of our client, the Capital City Development Corporation, or CCDC, until other meeting attendees arrived. I had been in this conference room in the past, but it was a little different this time.

The agency had renamed the conference room the Jane Jacobs Room to honor the noted urbanist and activist who offered a new vision for diverse and vibrant urban redevelopment that prioritized people over automobiles. A small card was on a table in the waiting room outside that listed 10 of Jacobs' principles the CCDC, Boise's urban redevelopment agency, has embraced in its daily work:

1. Eyes on the street.
2. Social capital.
3. The generators of diversity.
4. Form still follows function.
5. Local economies.
6. Innovation.
7. Make many little plans.
8. Gradual money.
9. Cities as organized complexity.
10. Citizen science.

I have run across many urban planners during my career whose critical thinking, innovative approaches, and practical applications changed the way I think about urban environments. This includes such names as Jan Gehl (Life Between Buildings), Daniel Hudson Burnham (Chicago architect and planner), Kevin Andrew Lynch (The Image of the City), and contemporary planners such as John Fregonese from Portland, Ore., with whom I had the pleasure of working on a project in Dallas, Texas.

A Little More About Jacobs

The card outside the conference room inspired me to learn more about Jane Jacobs. In her 1961 book, “The Death and Life of Great American Cities,” she critiqued 1950s urban planning policies, which she believed were responsible for the decline of many city neighborhoods in the U.S. Going against the modernist planning dogma of the era, Jacobs proposed a newfound appreciation for organic urban vibrancy in the United States.

Jacobs argued that modernist urban planning negatively affected cities because it rejected the value of human beings living in a community characterized by layered complexity and seeming chaos. The modernist planners preferred to use deductive reasoning to develop principles by which to plan cities. Among these policies, she considered urban renewal the most dangerous and prevalent of the era. These policies, she claimed, destroy communities and innovative economies by creating isolated, unnatural, urban spaces.

In their place Jacobs advocated for what she called “four generators of diversity” that create effective economic pools of use and emphasized the importance of place. Her four generators of diversity were:

- Mixed primary uses, activating streets at different times of the day.
- Short blocks, allowing high pedestrian permeability.
- Buildings of various ages and states of repair.
- Density.

She sought to better understand and develop concepts for the role of cities in the economy. She felt the importance of a sense of place and multi-dimensional diversity in urban policy and design allows us to see the multiplicity of economies and working cultures, in which regional, national, and global economies are embedded.

Parking and Mobility

In reviewing the 10 urban planning principles noted above, I was struck by how closely they resembled many of the planning principles I have adopted from multiple sources over the years:

- **Eyes on the Street:** *Pedestrian traffic throughout the day, and the watchful eyes that come with it, en-*

THE DEATH AND LIFE OF GREAT AMERICAN CITIES

JANE JACOBS

hance the safety of city streets. In my work with the International Downtown Association, I got to know and appreciate business improvement districts and downtown development authorities that run downtown clean-and-safe programs as a primary strategy for urban area revitalization. The eyes-on-the-street principle has become well accepted and has, in fact, become a central tenet of the policies endorsed by the philosophy of crime prevention through environmen-

tal design (CPTED).

- **Social Capital:** The idea that every day activities and interactions that occur in an area create a network of relationships between neighbors and generate social capital is central to Jacobs’ philosophy. As I have seen the parking profession grow and mature, I see parking professionals becoming more actively engaged in their communities and in the process of building foundations of mutual trust, shared efforts, and resilience in times of trouble. Examples include parking professionals who serve on multiple community boards or other civic institutions and offer programs such as food for fines (pay parking fines with food donations), forget the fines (pay parking fines with homeless center donations), etc. I think Jacobs would have endorsed activities and programs such as these.
- **The Generators of Diversity:** Four factors in city planning and design help make the city diverse, safe, social, convenient, and economically vibrant. These are mixed uses, aged buildings, small blocks, and population density. Certainly, modern parking garage design has embraced mixed-use facilities and enhanced architecture, and there are several that have embraced historic preservation by integrating old building facades into new garage designs. Emerging trends such as automated and adaptive reuse garages are useful concepts for supporting denser urban environments in the future.
- **Form Still Follows Function:** Fashions and technologies come and go, but what always remains relevant are the countless ways that people use the city, how the city works as a whole, and whether our urban design and planning reflect and serve those


functions. Adapting to changing environments and technologies is at the heart of modern parking management. Adopting new curb-lane management strategies to support ride hailing and other shared mobility innovations is a good example.

- **Local Economies:** Economic growth, whether local, national, or global, relies on the ability of urban economies to provide amply and diversely for themselves, rather than relying on imports. A key focus of my work the past decade has involved advancing the concept of parking as a tool for community and economic development. One component of this is leveraging parking infrastructure development to achieve a variety of other community benefits, such as green roofs, public art, integrated residential development, street-level retail, and community gathering places. Customer-friendly parking management is essential to supporting a diverse set of business enterprises, especially in dense urban environments.
- **Innovation and Creativity:** The greater the diversity of existing work in a local economy, the more opportunities to add new work and recombine old work in new ways. Parking structures can reflect community personality as well as cultural and social diversity. One of my favorite examples of this is the city of Eugene, Ore.'s, Step into Poetry program, along with its colorful garage murals, art-wrapped multi-space meters, and other public art projects.
- **Make Many Little Plans:** The diversity of a good neighborhood can only be achieved when we allow many different people to pursue their own little plans, individually and collectively. My first reaction to this principle was to contrast it with Daniel Burnham's famous quote: "Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work." After I let this contrast marinate a little, I realized that while these two statements seem to be at odds with each other, they are actually quite complementary. Both are needed to advance and sustain urban environments and their essential vitality and functionality.
- **Gradual Money:** Both diverse little plans and new kinds of work require diverse little sources of money available on an ongoing basis. Unfortunately, both public and private sources often only provide money floods and money droughts instead. I have been impressed in recent years to see local parking programs stepping up to be funding sources

or partners to support projects that benefit their communities' larger strategic goals. Examples include parking programs being financial supporters of downtown master plan projects or community bike-share programs.

- **Cities as Organized Complexity:** Cities function like ecosystems. Everything is connected to everything else in intricate, particular ways that cannot be captured well by statistics or formulas. Only close observation and reasoning from the bottom up will do. My work in cities has always held a fascination with the marvelous and often unexpected ways that dense, multicultural environments express themselves in urban settings. The rich and creative cultural stew created by so many diverse groups and activities can truly be magical (and even a little gritty at times). This authenticity is powerful and palpable, especially when contrasted to newer lifestyle centers that try to emulate urban cities but often come off feeling staged or contrived.
- **Citizen Science:** The people best equipped to understand urban complexity are ordinary interested citizens. Without the assumptions that often come with professional training, everyday users of the city can learn more freely from what they see and experience firsthand. I have spent my fair share of time attending or presenting to city council meetings and other community forums. Reinforcing this principle, I have often been impressed with the insights brought by the engaged citizens who attend these meetings. Their insights are grounded in their firsthand knowledge and experience of their communities. Merging these local insights into larger planning concepts through engaged community outreach always improves community planning in my opinion.

In Summary

While many of these concepts have become bedrock planning principles, it is often the simplest ideas that have the biggest effects. I am happy that many, if not all, of these principles are being integrated in day-to-day parking management programs across the country! 



L. DENNIS BURNS, CAPP, is regional vice president and senior practice builder with Kimley-Horn. He can be reached at dennis.burns@kimley-horn.com.