BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH CUL-DE-PARCS AND IMPROV COMEDY

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A senior project presented to the Landscape Architecture Department at the University of California, Davis in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor's of Science of Landscape Architecture.

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ABSTRACT

Suburban sprawl is a tragedy both to the social welfare of its residents as well as the environment. As over half of Americans are currently living in the suburbs (US Census, 2010), the problem is widespread and affects a significant number of people. This project aims to address the lack of sense of community in suburbia through a design proposal and an exploration of the principles of improvisational comedy.

The design proposal is for an intervention called a Cul-de-Parc to be placed in cul-de-sacs as functional communal space. An analysis of these pocket parks illustrates the positive and negative impacts a Cul-de-Parc can have, as well as its environmental benefits, as part of a larger vision to retrofit suburban neighborhoods and implement new urbanist theory. The project also examines the obstacles that would have to be overcome to achieve a community with strong social relationships.

Improv comedy offers a unique lens in building community from both a design and a social perspective because an analysis of its theory can illuminate elements for a thriving community. Applying the principles of improvisation will further develop a sense of community by complimenting the intervention of a Cul-de-Parc.Using the neighborhood of La Costa Oaks in Carlsbad, California, the project concludes that although there are many costly and bureaucratic obstacles, Cul-de-Parcs are a worthy investment and can provide an example for alternative suburban development.

DEDICATIONS

To Ema and Aba-

Any success of mine is attributed to your constant love and support.
I promise to try to call more often.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my esteemed committe:
Elizabeth Boults, David de la Peña, and Marq Truscott-

I am grateful for your help and guidance through three
different senior projects (sorry about that). But most of all, I
feel priveleged to have had the opportunity to learn from you
and be inspired by you.

To my peers:

To me, studio was never about getting anything done (which
may have shown in some of my work), it was very simply a
place to laugh with my friends.

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PREFACE

I am the product of suburbia. Since the second grade I've lived in two different neighborhoods in Southern California, and both homes have been on a cul-de-sac. Although there was an occasional kick ball game when I was younger, families would rarely gather or even interact with one another and while literally surrounded by other residents of the community, it was often a lonely place to be.

I have been doing improv comedy for eight years, and plan to continue. To make people laugh is an extraordinary feeling, but what I truly love is the unified interest of the team to support one another with the knowledge that it cannot be done alone.

It is not my intention to preach to the world about how to build community, merely to explore options and offer new perspective. Developing this project has helped me understand how I can form stronger relationships with those around me, and I find that to be more powerful than any single lesson I have learned during my schooling. If "All the world's a stage," I would find it more satisfying to be a part of a great ensemble than a one-man show.

What should young people do with their lives today? Many things, obviously. But the most daring thing is to create stable communities in which the terrible disease of loneliness can be cured.

-Kurt Vonnegut

INTRODUCTION

Suburbia is a landscape of disconnection, both in its physical form and as a social model. What was once seen as the American Dream is in reality an environmental disaster, and engenders the inability for healthy social relationships within suburban communities. The lack of public space between single-family homes creates distance between neighbors, who are caged in by tall fences and garage doors. Increasing communal space will provide residents with an opportunity for better social interaction. Additionally, making connections between community building and the principles of improv can provide a new perspective on the foundations of community.

The proposal is to design Cul-de-Parcs. The idea is simple -- replace the dead space in the center of a cul-de-sac with a pocket park. The parks will provide gathering space for neighbors while also reclaiming paved space for a more environmentally sensitive alternative. The shared space could revive a sense of community and give life back to neighborhoods that at times can feel desolate and lonely. Improvisational comedy has many relatable guidelines, which can contribute to a deeper understanding of how to build community. Cul-de-Parcs may serve as a beginning step to a retrofit of suburbia, while improv, along with new urbanist planning ideals, can provide the order for which to build by. Cul-de-Parcs may be the initial phase to reconnect communities on a larger scale and reinvent the suburban neighborhood.

RESEARCH METHODS

To understand the viability of Cul-de-Parcs, I conducted research by means of literature reviews and phone interviews. I then examined both the qualitative and quantitative impacts of an intervention for a single cul-de-sac and the possible effects it could have on a sense of community. Further literature study was done on the principles of improvisation comedy to draw connections between them and the design rationale.

CURRENT STATE OF SUBURBIA

Although the early part of this decade, specifically 2010 to 2012, saw a growth in urban population, a recent Wall Street Journal article showed that the trend is shifting back to suburban growth. Looking at a larger timescale shows that overall, slightly more Americans are choosing to move to cities; however the new trend may be an indicator of a return to the more traditional city-suburban growth (Shah, 2014).

As can be seen in Figure 01.01 , after a few years of suburban decline and city growth, the trends have equalized until more recently, growth has returned to the suburbs.   Although its unknown for how long the spike will continue, for now, the suburbs still hold a significant amount of the population.

Suburban tract development is perpetuated because it can be extremely profitable (Rogers, 2009). Our capitalist market bases economic success on growth, meaning continuous development of tract homes and typical suburban neighborhoods (Duany, 2000). The irony is that once in suburbia, many people become disillusioned with the continued growth due to problems such as more traffic congestion, it does not enhance their private realm and only degrades the public realm, (Duany, 2000). Since more than half of the current population already lives in suburbia, numerous people are deprived of the opportunity for a community that cares and supports one another.

Back to the 'Burbs

A thawing economy has slowed the postrecession growth rate for big city populations and accelerated a return to the suburbs and beyond.

Change from the previous year in population

Suburbs and exurbs

Urban core

recessions

2001 '03 '05 '07 '09 '11 '13

Source: analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data by William H. Frey of Brookings Institution
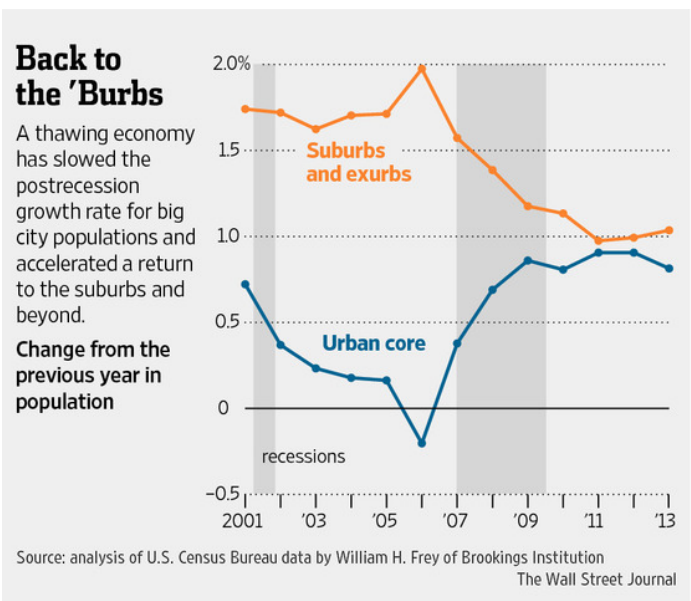The Wall Street Journal

FIGURE 01.01 (LEFT) Suburban sprawl conquering the landscape
FIGURE 01.02 (ABOVE) American housing trends

THE NEED FOR COMMUNITY

Residential areas of the suburbs lack an experiential richness (Duany, 2000). A public environment that is relatively devoid of experiential space can result in people behaving as though it is meaningless (Sennett, 1977). While suburban McMansions in the United States provide perhaps the most square footage in the private realm, the moment one steps out the front door they enter the bare public realm (Duany, 2000). Shared outdoor space has a stronger positive impact on sense of community than the size of lots or activity that is limited to the backyard or porch (Kearney, 2006). To nurture a sense of community, common places should supplement private living areas (Williams, 2007).

Richard Sennett's *The Fall of Public Man* suggests that modern public life has become a matter of obligation rather than of desire, and that there are inadequate bonds between people, aside from family or intimate ties. The book, *The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream,* proposes that it is impossible to imagine a community without communal space (Duany, 2009). Perhaps in this day and age, it should be specified that public life is in decline in the built environment, while it may be developing in the virtual (Duany, 2009).

The importance of interaction in actuality remains vital for a productive community with healthy social relationships. Virtual communities where diverse people can interact online may actually supplement the lack of communal space through forums, social networks, etc. A similar platform should be required in the built environment for the neighborhood.

The lack of foundation for social interaction outdoors may be fulfilled with a Cul-de-Parc. In striving for a retrofit of sprawling suburbia, successful pedestrian life can only exist with meaningful destinations (Duany, 2000). These destinations are perhaps fewer in suburbia than they are on the Internet. The idea of spreading many small destinations throughout a neighborhood gives one a reason to move about. The meaning may be derived from themes that a Cul-de-Parc is designed for, whether it is a gathering area with the feel of a small plaza or a community garden where teamwork is key. Multiple meaningful destinations draw community members to interact and give purpose to the public domain.

In *Ecovillage living: restoring the earth and her people* by Jackson and Svensson, Jan Martin Bang is quoted as saying "The most important part of the physical design is actually the social development of the community, and design might be seen as a group building process." This ideal is the driving force behind Cul-de-Parcs. Residents of suburbia are deprived of the opportunity to build strong ties and lasting relationships (Rogers, 2009).

FIGURE 01.03 Bland and repetitive streets lack experiential richness

SENSE OF COMMUNITY

In many instances, sense of place relies on the availability and sociability of a community within that place. Sense of community is defined by psychologists McMillan and Chavis as the extent to which a member feels connected and committed to others in the community, and in return feels a sense of security and belonging.

This theory is based on accomplishing these four objectives (McMillan, 1986):

1. Membership, which brings about the sense of belonging or emotional safety.
2. Influence, in which members of the community can affect and change one another.
3. Reinforcement and needs fulfillment, where the feeling or perception that needs are met through the cooperation and group success.
4. Emotional connection, achieved through sharing life experiences, time, and/or place.

This is not to say that all interaction is positive, but to have the mere opportunity for socially healthy living is crucial. In fact, even weak social ties can both motivate a resident to be more involved in his or her community as well as to open doors to further social networking (Rogers, 2009). Connections will strengthen with the establishment of shared value. Additionally, as it is easier to become a part of a smaller community, Cul-de-Parcs make sense because of the number of people that can occupy them at any one time is small (McMillan, 1986). Small gatherings at first may lead to the desire to reverse the perpetuated cycle, and later result in the demand for even more public space from the city and its developers.

CONSEQUENCES OF POOR DESIGN

The suburban landscape is often described as having no sense of place (Rogers, 2009). Without compelling common space in the ever-sprawling developments, it is easy to understand the lack of connection to the landscape and to one another. Curvy streets and cul-de-sacs disorient and can frustrate users and visitors (Duany, 2000). Zoning laws separate residential, business, shopping, and civic institutions, which are then connected by roadways that are not pedestrian friendly and cover inordinate distances. Cul-de-sacs, which were originally intended as a response to topography, are now used excessively and disconnect convinient traffic patterns. (Duany, 2000).

The principle of design to encourage social contact is largely nonexistent (Williams, 2007). The landscape could benefit from more shared open space with well defined boundaries (Rogers, 2009). Public spaces are mandated in most residential zoning laws, however regulations limit their usability and make them as homogenous as the rest of the neighborhood (Duany, 2000).

Open space needs to be supplied in a variety of fashions to meet diverse needs, from untouched natural habitats, playful spaces for children, to plazas for teens and adults. These examples are versatile in their usage and provide different experiences than the most 'common' public park of pure lawn, which can even be seen in the La Costa Oaks neighborhood. Such spaces are worthwhile, but can become even more valuable when complemented by a variety of other options. A Cul-de-Parc can be designed by type to meet these needs, creating unique spaces throughout the community, and therefore encouraging more pedestrian traffic between them.

FIGURE 01.04 The maze-like suburbia exaggerated by artist Ross Racine
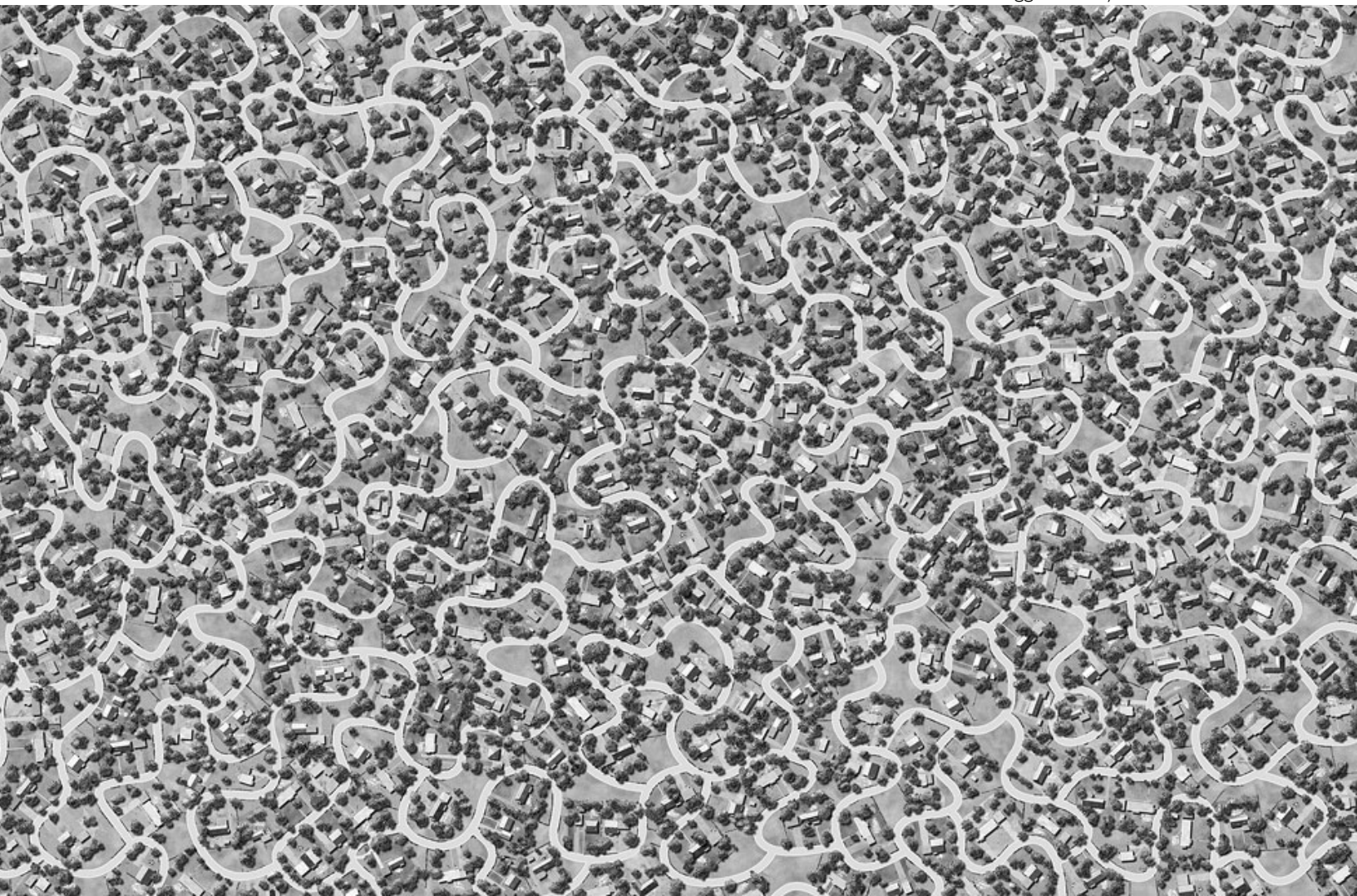
LA COSTA OAKS

I chose the community of La Costa Oaks in Carlsbad, California, to serve as a case study, based on its layout as a typical suburban neighborhood. The community is considered upper-middle class and is mostly Caucasian (Find the Best, 2012). The neighborhood consists of a significantly high number of children and teenagers with over 40 percent of the population under 20 years old.

The affluence of the neighborhood may restrict some comparisons to other suburban developments across the country, although it may also serve as an example where an intervention such as a Cul-de-Parc has a better chance of being implemented through resident contribution. It is important to note that the typical layout is the fundamental consideration in choosing the neighborhood as a model for many suburban neighborhoods where there is potential for the implementation of Cul-de-Parcs and the need for sense of community.

FIGURE 01.05 Typical sprawling layout of La Costa Oaks Neighborhood in Carlsbad, California

LA COSTA OAKS CONTEXT

La Costa Oaks is located near the coast between the citties of Carlsbad and Encinitas in San Diego county. These maps show its location relative to other cities and the ocean.
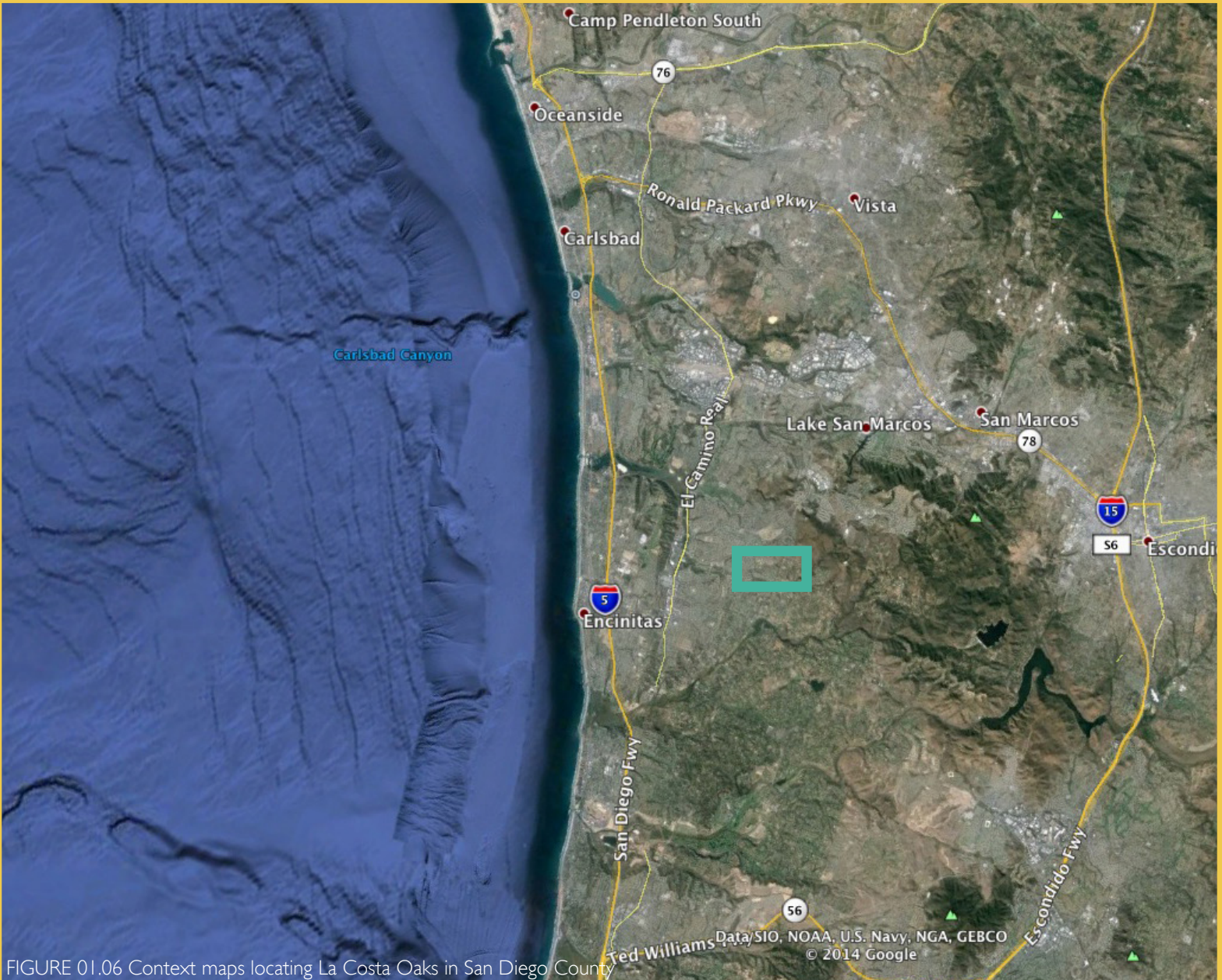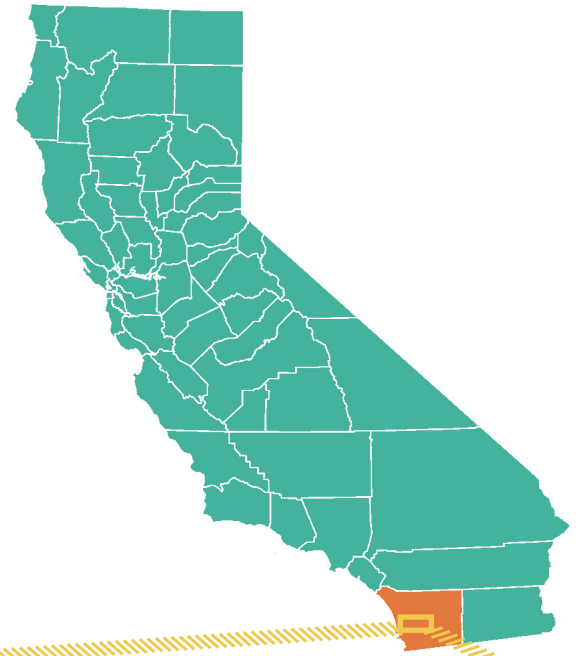

FIGURE 01.06 Context maps locating La Costa Oaks in San Diego County

CUL-DE-PARCS

Cul-de-Parcs offer versatility. Essentially, they are a blank canvas that can become an intriguing part of a landscape that brings people together. Well-planned suburban neighborhoods have homes that face communal space, often with parking spaces and roadways on the opposite side (Schaffer, 1982). In conventional suburban neighborhoods, houses in a cul-de-sac all face towards the street, therefore it only makes sense to reclaim some of the pavement and design communal space in the center. As people are inherently interested in activity, once some users establish the space, it will continue to draw others (Duany, 2000).

It is important to create communal space that is both attractive as well as safe. Therefore, a Cul-de-Parc design should follow the principles of crime prevention through environmental design, or CPTED (CPTED Security, 2005).

Cul-de-Parcs are visible, both from home windows and street traffic. Lighting is placed to illuminate faces while not too bright to blind either the user or those observing with glare. Comfort and security are also reinforced through distinctive boundaries (Duany, 2000). Through a change in paving and landscape features serving as walls, Cul-de-Parcs can provide a safe gathering space even in the middle of the street; in fact, it will also slow traffic within the cul-de-sac. Additionally, communities can plan scheduled events in Cul-de-Parcs, which enhances proper use and gives the perception that the area is controlled (CPTED Security, 2005).

Shared spaces, goods, and materials can bring about interaction within communities. The ideals of Cul-de-Parcs can be to envision them as a resource that may not otherwise be readily available to residents, such as a woodshop or community garden. With communal space supplementing or replacing private space, neighbors become more dependent on one another, and their fair use of shared materials.

FIGURE 02.02 Members of the Domes community at UC Davis build together using tools that are available to all residents

Windows provide casual supervison

Porches and sidewalks encourage neighbor interaction

Paving and architectural features define spaces

Pedestrian scaled lighting

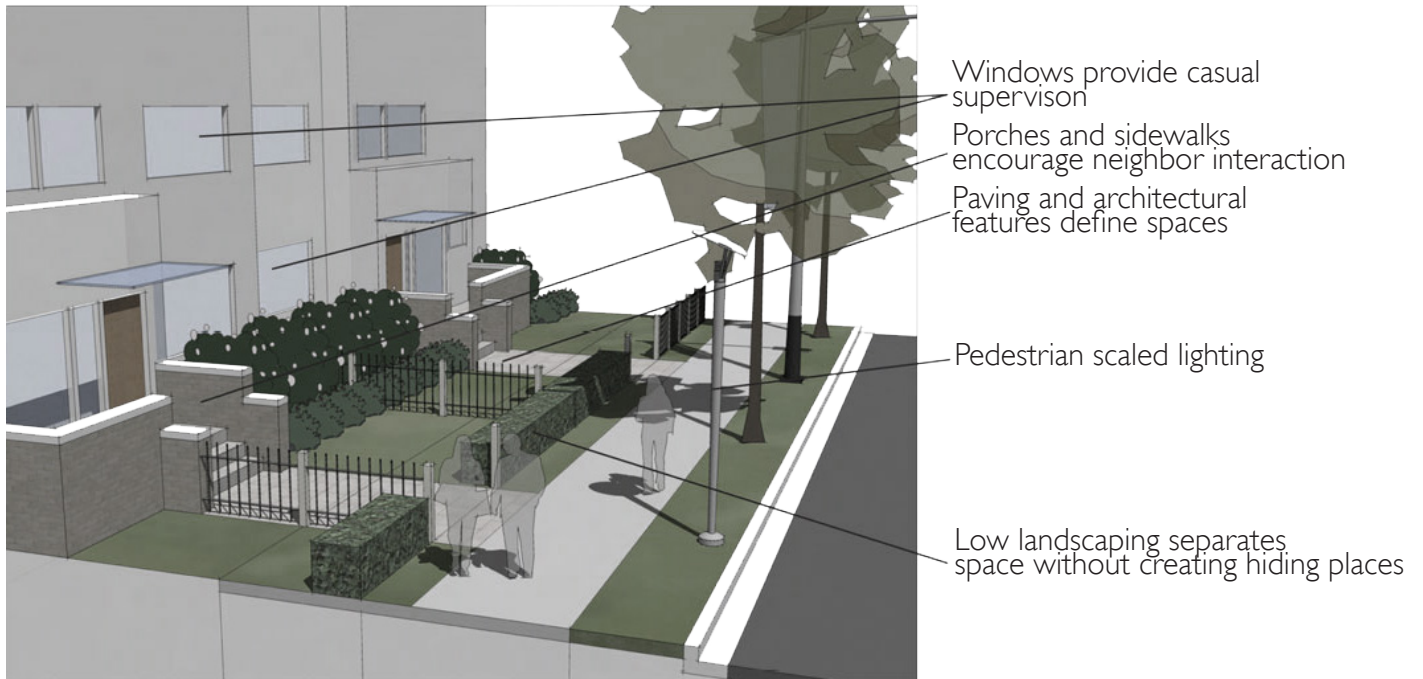Low landscaping separates space without creating hiding places

FIGURE 02.01 CPTED principles

SITE ANALYSIS

Before designing a Cul-de-Parc it is important to understand the opportunities and constraints of the existing cul de sac. Noting these limitations will allow for a more realistic design that addresses issues of the particular site. The figure (02.03) below is Corte Pino Court, a cul-de-sac in the La Costa Oaks neighborhood. It provides an example as all the cul-de-sacs in the neighborhood are built to the same specifications.

potential size of site

verge turf could be removed for larger site

loss of cul de sac parking

96'

10'

705 - 1810 sq ft

loss of trees when removal of verge planting

24'

emergency access lane requirement

FIGURE 02.03 Site Analysis of Corte Pino Crt, in La Costa Oaks

A VISION FOR SUBURBIA

DESIGN PROTOTYPES

Provided, are some examples for potential designs, each with a unique purpose while providing the goal of gathering space to bring people together.

EDIBLE GARDEN

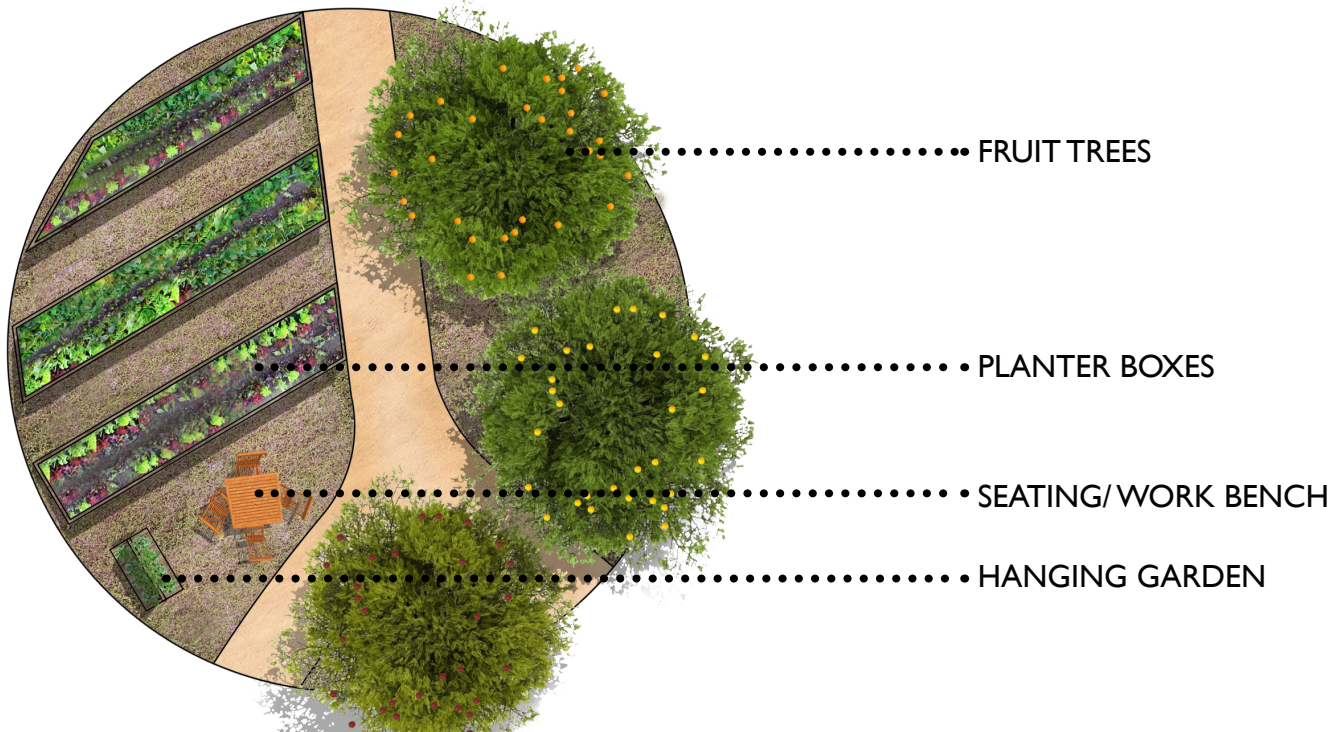FRUIT TREES

PLANTER BOXES

SEATING/ WORK BENCH

HANGING GARDEN

FIGURE 02.05 (ABOVE) Plan for a edible garden Cul-de-Parc
FIGURE 02.06 (BELOW) View of a edible garden Cul-de-Parc

PLAYFUL
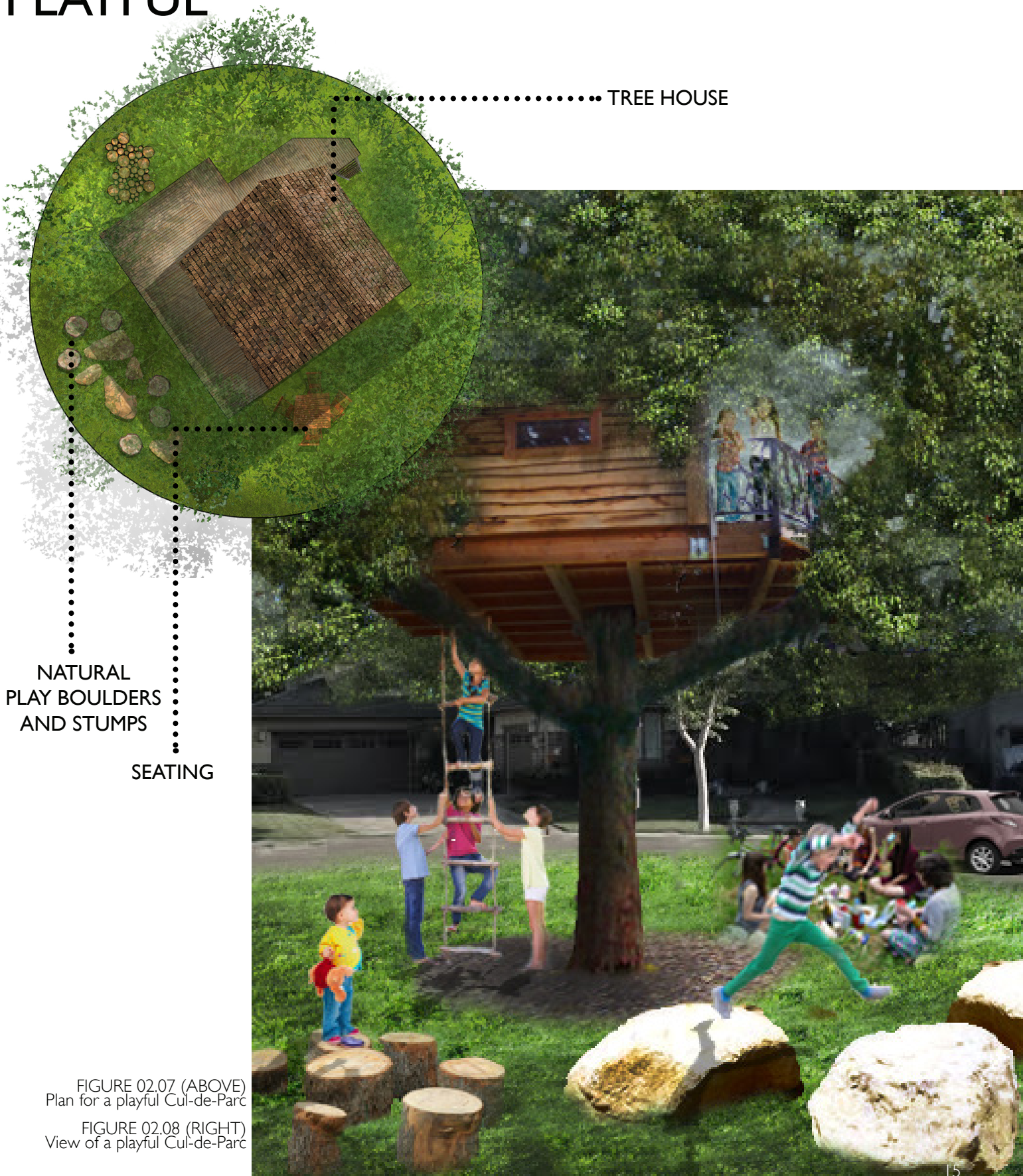
TREE HOUSE

NATURAL
PLAY BOULDERS
AND STUMPS

SEATING

FIGURE 02.07 (ABOVE)
Plan for a playful Cul-de-Parc

FIGURE 02.08 (RIGHT)
View of a playful Cul-de-Parc

PLAZA

GRASS MOUND ······················
COMMUNITY GRILL ······················
POROUS PAVERS ······················
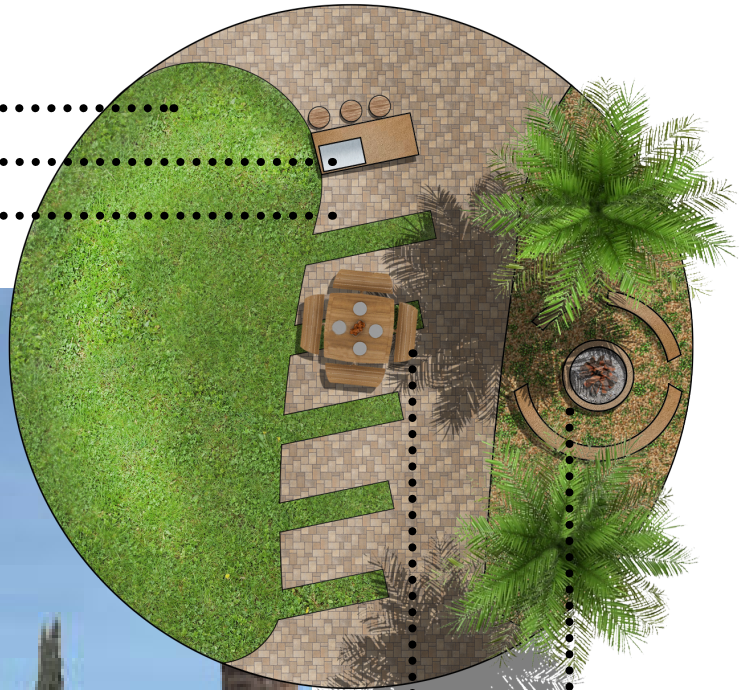
SEATING

FIRE PIT

FIGURE 02.09 (ABOVE) Plan for a plaza Cul-de-Parc

FIGURE 02.10 (LEFT) View in a plaza Cul-de-Parc

RESTFUL

LUSCIOUS ARCHWAY

SEATING

BEE AND
BUTTERFLY
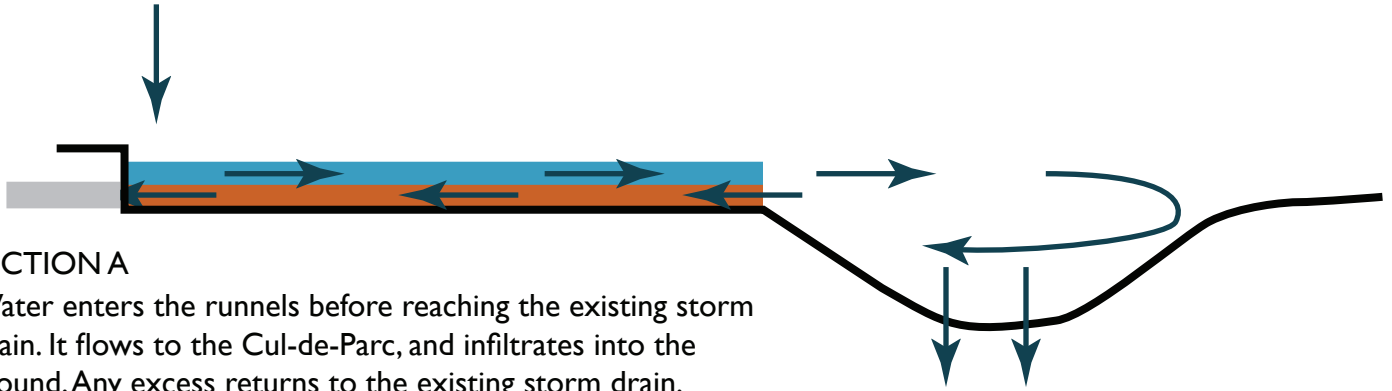FRIENDLY
NATIVE PLANTS

FIGURE 02.11 (ABOVE)
Plan for a restful Cul-de-Parc

FIGURE 02.12 (LEFT) View
in a restful Cul-de-Parc

STORM WATER CATCHMENT

SECTION A

Water enters the runnels before reaching the existing storm drain. It flows to the Cul-de-Parc, and infiltrates into the ground. Any excess returns to the existing storm drain.

FIGURE 02.13 Section A of water flow in street runnels

SECTION B

The runnels are compacted with gravel to slow the water and increase infiltration as well as providing a driveable surface.

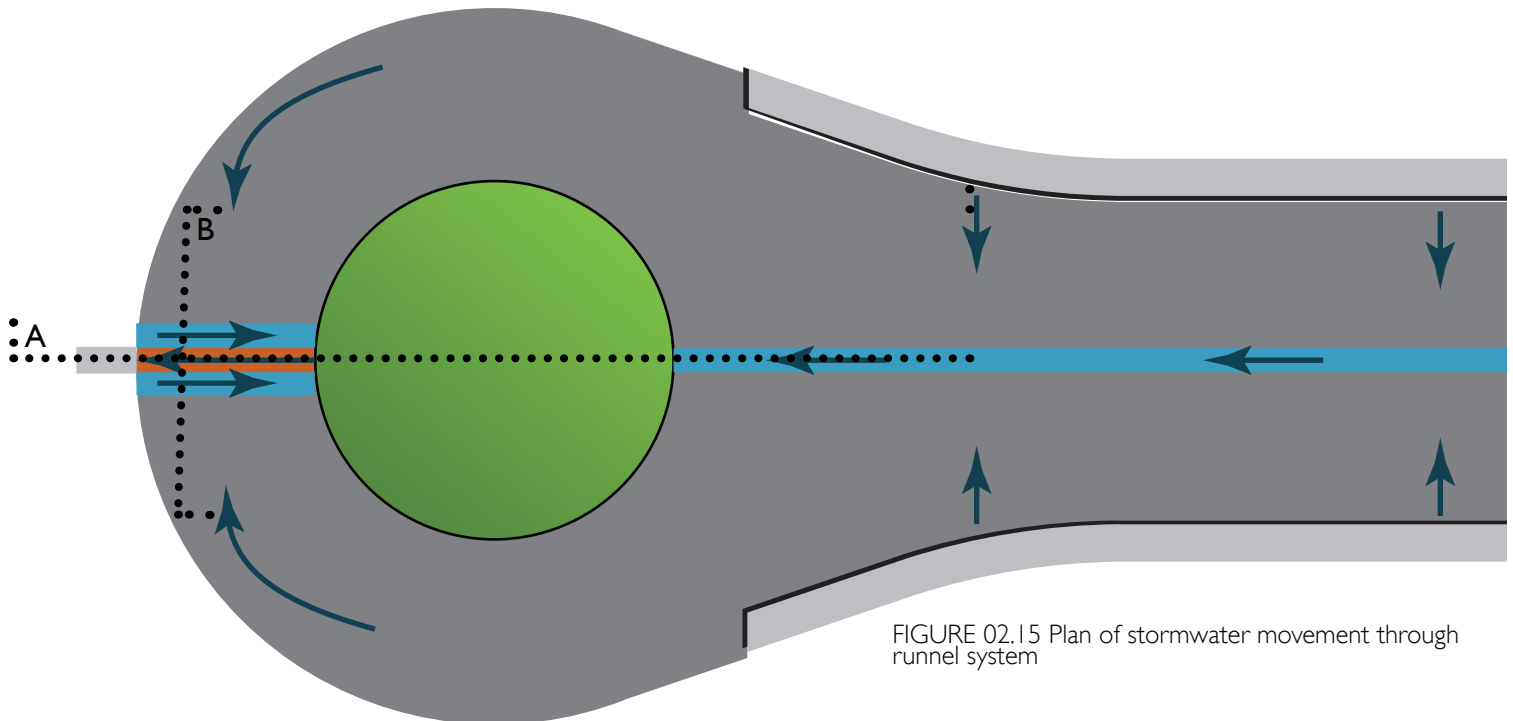FIGURE 02.14 Section B through street runnels

FIGURE 02.15 Plan of stormwater movement through runnel system

PLAN

For the least amount of re-grading, only the actual installation would have to be regraded to a reverse crown while the runnels would work with the existing conditions.

PLANT PALETTE

NATIVE HABITAT: COASTAL SAGE SCRUB   SOIL TYPE: SILTY LOAM

Golden Yarrow
Eriophyllum confertiflorum
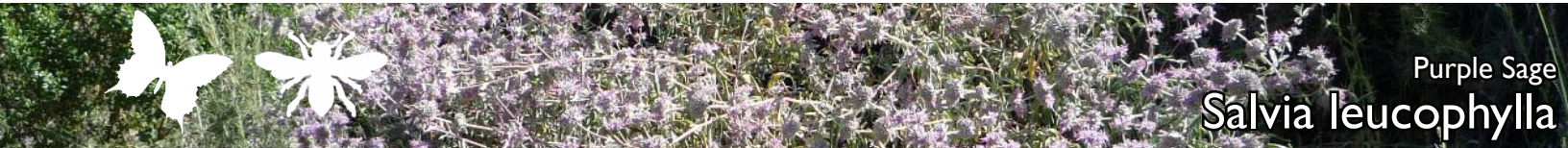
Purple Sage
Salvia leucophylla

Bladderpod Mustard
Lesquerella gordonii

Califronia Sagebrush
Artemisia californica

Purple Needlegrass
Nassella pulchra

Woolly Blue Curls
Trichostema lanatum

White Sage
Salvia apiana

Ashyleaf Buckwheat
Eriogonum cinereum

California Buckwheat
Eriogonum fasciculatum

Ashyleaf Buckwheat
Rhus integrifolia

Mexican Fan Palm
Washingtonia robusta

Coast Live Oak
Quercus agrifolia

FIGURE 02.16 Planting Palette

OTHER POTENTIAL IMPACTS

A Cul-de-Parc is a marketable commodity. It is a product that has social, fiscal, and environmental value. While this project focuses on Cul-de-Parcs as a tool to build community, this section illustrates the fiscal and environmental impacts it may have as well.

FISCAL

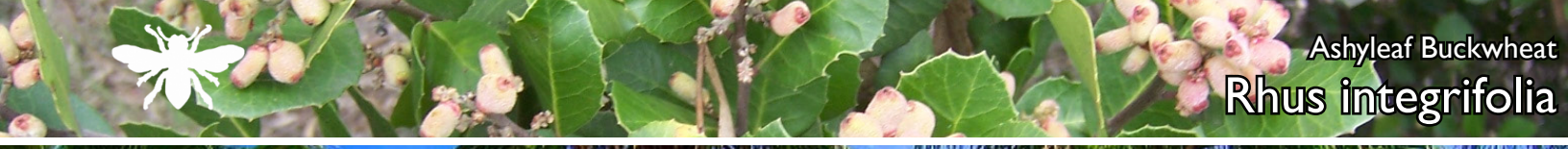Pocket parks have the potential to raise property value, in this case considered a hedonic value, which is an amenity or profit that is gained from environmental measures (Harnik, 2009). As property values increase, the city can raise property taxes and gain revenue. The hedonic value of a park relates to the significance of the park and its distance from residences (Harnik, 2009). The Trust for Public Land only considers parks to have significance when they are at least an acre in size, however significance is subjective, and pocket parks can have a powerful impact when meeting the needs of a community. The Trust finds that the most valuable parks are within 500 feet of a residence; within 2000 feet is still considered to have serious value (Harnik, 2009). In this regard, a Cul-de-Parc is attractive because of its location between multiple residences and its accessibility to neighbors on nearby streets. An "excellent park" can add 15 percent to property value while a "problematic park" can reduce the value by 5 percent (Harnik, 2009).

The social benefits a community can have on its members, even simply by knowing the neighbors, translates to literal savings. Some examples may include reduced crime and therefore reduction in police and fire expenses (Harnik, 2009). The cost of the parks themselves should also be taken into consideration. In regards to the La Costa Oaks neighborhood, city plans show utility lines cutting straight through cul-de-sacs, meaning an added cost for retrofitting. The funds may come from the city, the developer, the residents, or a combination of sources.

ENVIRONMENT

By removing a large percentage of pavement in a cul-de-sac, a Cul-de-Parc can capture a significant amount of storm water. Calculating the amount of runoff with an increase in pervious or landscaped areas can be given a dollar amount per gallon (Harnik, 2009). Furthermore, simply planting a single tree can absorb 10 pounds of air pollutants a year, and produce nearly 260 pounds of oxygen, enough to support two people (American Foresters). Additionally, suburban developments can be 10 degrees hotter than surrounding rural or natural areas (EPA). The suburban heat island can be reduced with the planting of vegetation. Trees and vegetation, other than providing shade and decreasing the amount of surfaces that emit reflective radiation, also cool the air through evapotranspiration. Depending on the size of the Cul-de-Parc, it could potentially lower the surface temperature by 2 to 4.5 degrees Fahrenheit (Skelhorn, 2014).

HEALTH

Recreational open space also improves the physical and mental health of a community. For example, the addition of landscaping instead of the paved view from a front window can have substantial calming effects (Kearny, 2006).

POTENTIAL QUANTITATIVE IMPACTS

The table shows changes between current conditions of a cul-de-sac versus the different sizes of Cul-de-Parcs that could be installed. The size and impacts vary by whether or not verge planters already existed and the desire to maintain or remove the sidewalk.

		PARC SIZE	LOSS OF PAVEMENT	STORMWATER CAPACITY	LOSS OF SURFACE HEAT	CHANGE IN PROPERTY VALUE	LOSS OF PARKING
BEFORE		--	NONE	NONE	NONE	NONE	NONE
		--	NONE	4210 gal	NONE	NONE	NONE
AFTER		705 ft²	11%	4380 gal	2.0°F	↑15% TO ↓5%	APPROX. 10 SPACES
		1130 ft²	16% / 2%*	7015 gal	2.9°F / 0.2°F*	↑15% TO ↓5%	APPROX. 10 SPACES
		1810 ft²	11%	11240 gal	4.5°F	↑15% TO ↓5%	APPROX. 10 SPACES

*Values if verge planter was existing and removed to make Cul-de-Parc larger

FIGURE 02.17 Table of quantitative impacts

DRAWBACKS AND OBSTACLES

It is important to remember that suburbia is not evil. In fact, the cul-de-sac could be described as a humble innovation that serves a desirable function in a practical way (Martinson, 2000). The added safety and distance from busier streets make cul-de-sacs attractive for families. Unfortunately, installing a Cul-de-Parc would also limit the size of the cul-de-sac as a play surface, as it is a space commonly used for play such as kickball or catch. The retrofitting process should not ignore the positive aspects of suburbia; it should embrace them as much as possible to become part of a larger plan to provide communities with the opportunity for a better lifestyle, both physically and mentally. However, after decades of acceptance of the suburban model, it may be difficult to challenge what many know to be the norm.

Inherent in suburban culture is the 'Nimby' attitude, otherwise known as 'Not in my Backyard' (Duany, 2000). The manner in which change is proposed to people with a Nimby outlook is crucial in successfully persuading them to cooperate. After all, suburbia as it is may be exactly what they wanted; many people find beauty in the strict order and general cleanliness (Duany, 2000). To the therefore it is important to convey that in many places around the country, alternatives such as a well planned, mixed-use development as envisioned by new urbanists don't exist. In targeting suburbia, urbanists often attempt to dissuade developers who perpetuate sprawl, but in reality developers are meeting a demand from people who are looking for that McMansion on a cul-de-sac. The problem is more deeply rooted by the fact that many people are simply ignorant of other options that are not readily available to them. Another obstacle would be the legislation that would have to take place at a range of scales in order to change laws and regulations to allow for a space such as a Cul-de-Parc and a mixed-use development. Much of sprawl can actually be attributed to zoning laws that strictly delineate spaces, which create disconnection and automobile dependency (Duany, 2000). In regards to Cul-de-Parcs, regulations would have to be changed on a smaller scale. Homeowner's associations may facilitate changes between residents and municipal requirements; this procedure may differ amongst communities.

In the case of the La Costa Oaks community, Sheila Brustkern represents residents for the Walters Property Management Company that oversees the neighborhood. In a phone interview with Brustkern, she explained that the property management committee must decide upon interventions in communal spaces. Any design work must adhere to guidelines set by the committee (such as materials, planting palette, etc.), which can only be changed by the committee itself (Brustkern, 2014). If the desire for a Cul-de-Parc came directly from a resident, it would have to be presented to the committee through Brustkern. Additionally, in La Costa Oaks, there would be no way for residents to be a part of the design process unless they were to join the committee itself (Brustkern, 2014). Unfortunately, the bureaucracy is a hurdle that must be overcome in many suburban neighborhoods, which is why changing people's mindsets may be the most important step to persuade residents and similar committees.

IMPR O V COMEDY

Understanding how to build a sense of community in suburbia through the lens of improv comedy evokes a new perspective on designing spaces that engage community as a whole as well as emphasize the responsibilities of individual members themselves. In many cases, the principles and guidelines of improvisation mirror a well functioning community. For the purpose of this project, the principles of improv that are referenced are derived from Long Form comedic improvisation-- scene based comedy that is entirely made up on the spot based on a suggestion from the audience.

BUILDING A REALITY

Improv involves building complete worlds with rules, environments and relationships; improvisers are both the designers and the users of these environments (Halpern, 1994). In suburban neighborhoods, it is the sense of community itself that needs constructing, for the very people constructing it. The improvisers must together make a base reality, an understanding of who, what, and where. Once established, true success and entertainment arise from the relationship of the characters within this reality, similar to any good story, book, or movie (Besser, 2013). It is as crucial for scene partners to understand and agree on the context of the reality they have created, as it is important for a community to understand its spatial context as a part of the larger landscape it is a part of.

RELATIONSHIPS

Scenes in improv go sour when the characters are strangers to one another; when applied to suburbia, this sounds strikingly familiar to a neighborhood with no sense of community. As people are what make a scene interesting, funny, and engaging, so it is with members of a community. In this context it is also important to understand the concept of making each other look good; in improv "the only star is the ensemble itself" (Halpern, 1994). Improvisers must relinquish their egos and work together! Similarly, a community does not shine because of one star member; it's very much a team effort.

Del Close, a legendary improv instructor who co-wrote *Truth in Comedy*, a widely respected improvisation manual said "[improv] is beautiful, honest, and truthful... which puts your attention on what is important about being a human in community - as opposed to television entertainment, which is designed to take your mind off the more important things in life." The same can be said for common space; it is this thought process that drives the impetus for Cul-de-Parcs, a place for people to relate to one another in a space of natural integrity.

TRUST AND SUPPORT

YES, AND

Improv is "sharing the burden of discovery and creation," it is very simply a give and take, a united effort to create something together (Besser, 2013). An audience does not want to watch improvisers fighting for focus. A principle that goes along with the previous one is the idea of trust and support between teammates. It is the idea that if you "treat others as if they are poets, geniuses, and artists, they will be" (Halpern, 1994). The trust that individuals will support each other is a healthy way for relationships to develop in a community.

Members of the community can also practice this principle by embracing the 'show don't tell' philosophy, where speaking with actions is more gratifying than speaking with words. In improv it is a theory that advocates realistic dialogue to convey a space, or the engagement with the environment rather than simply announcing it; by making decisions about the environment or plot and offering it to the other scene partners. In a practical sense it can also be understood as taking initiative, which even in improv is met with appreciation and not seen as a cry for attention. In fact, an improviser's actions are often referred to as gifts, and when they are not used it is a form of denial, or rejection. In reality, not every idea should necessarily be executed, however it is the ability to present ideas in a comfortable atmosphere where they will be received with gratitude that counts.

For both improv and a functioning community, rules and guidelines provide structure for things to run smoothly. The pinnacle of improv is the idea of 'Yes And.' It is how improvisers build a scene by agreeing with the reality their partner has built as well as adding on to it (Besser, 2013). It is a matter of accepting the current moment and growing with it, instead of denying or working against it (Halpern, 1994).

Members of a community should understand that it is their responsibility to come together to better their shared environment, perhaps by responding to their built environment in a communal way. It is also how a community could conceive of a design proposal, when everyone builds on an idea together. Landscape Architect Walter Hood brings up a similar point in a TED Talk, where he encourages accepting the landscape, letting it be, and working along side it. Community is a matter of engagement both with people and the existing landscape (Hood, 2011).

Yes, And can be interpreted as a form of justification of another performer's choices. Whether its partaking in its improvement or simply using and occupying the space, engagement with a space or landscape justifies it.

UNDERSTANDING
AND AGREEING TO THE
CONTEXT AND BASE
REALITY

FINDING THE GAME
WITHIN THE REALITY

THE IMPORTANCE
OF RELATIONSHIPS

ACHIEVING
GROUPMIND
THROUGH SUPPORT

FIGURE 03.01
Improv principles
in a community

GAME

The Upright Citizen's Brigade (UCB), an improv group from Los Angeles, teaches improv by breaking the base reality with the first unusual thing that is said, otherwise known as the game. Due to the unscripted nature of improv, unusual circumstances inevitably arise, and once they are presented they are heightened for comedy against the backdrop of the reality that has been established (Besser, 2013). The game is what is interesting about a scene, as well as what is funny.

Suburbia can be considered the reality, a repetitive structure with clear rules and limitations. A Cul-de-Parc can then be understood as the game, it is what invigorates and creates intrigue. The versatility of themes or designs of Cul-de-Parcs can keep the game exciting instead of just becoming part of the mundane backdrop. A game cannot be conceived by one player, it needs a response to heighten and progress relationships. Similarly, a space may not have character on its own, but users can respond to a space by adding to it through their own behaviors and therefore heightening its meaning and value.

GROUPMIND

Only through cooperation and support can a community form what is considered to be a groupmind, a subconscious understanding between members of a group (Halpern, 1994). Once goals are clear within a set of rules, actions can be taken to progress the sense of community and create thriving relationships. When groupmind is achieved, a community is productive and efficient in building something together.

CONCLUSION

The reality is that suburban tract development has proven to be extremely profitable and now covers much of the American landscape, draining resources and disconnecting members of the same community from one another. Perhaps this cycle is perpetuated because housing options are limited. For those who are looking for the suburban lifestyle, there are limited choices in the types of communities that are available. If suburban developments began retrofitting their current street patterns with more communal space, the demand for such neighborhoods may grow and positively affect the typical outcomes of a suburban lifestyle.

The implementation of Cul-de-Parcs may be difficult, but their potential benefit is immense. Improving the environmental conditions of suburbia and enhancing the social needs of the residents would provide an invaluable resource. At the very least, it may be a worthy attempt; once established, its costs and benefits could be reexamined.

In general, the principles of improv that I presented are not revolutionary ideas. They are theories that many people would assume or understand as common knowledge; however, when looked at within the context of a performance for a captive audience, the stakes are heightened and the principles become essential for a successful show. For a community, the audience and the performers are one in the same, meaning there is even more at stake, one's own well-being.

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