

INSIDE: SIERRA CLUB TRIPS FOR SUMMER AND FALL

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Farmers' markets, like this one in San Francisco, can provide a sense of community as well as organic fruits and vegetables.

markets are booming across the country, their numbers increasing to 2,410, a 40 percent gain from 1994 to 1996. These markets not only create a festive community atmosphere, but also give people access to fresh, often organic produce, and even serve as tools for economic development. Oriented toward small entrepreneurs, these markets offer job opportunities, and make shopping by bicycle or foot possible. The main rule, according to Maureen Atkinson of the Urban Marketing Collaborative in Toronto: "Keep it funky. Don't make it a mall."

Revive historic and local building styles

Historic buildings have an undeniable appeal, partly because they were often built to last, using materials and styles appropriate to the regional climate. Coherent local building styles also serve to unite diverse people, says David Rice, executive director of the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority. "In the best examples," he says, "differences among people—race, income, and social status—are less evident than the shared sense of community identity."

Rice points to the redevelopment of a public housing

complex called Diggstown, which was transformed through the addition of humanizing, historic touches like porches, walkways, and lampposts. "It's really very exciting to see," says Ray Gindroz, the project's principal architect. "There's a sense of self-esteem and community that wasn't there before." Police report that drug use and the crime rate have declined; in stark contrast to the desolate landscape of many public housing projects, Gindroz reports that in Diggstown "you see family reunions being held."

Bring back public space

Another casualty of modernist planning has been the traditional civic commons, which has been displaced by public space that is privatized in the extreme: the shopping mall, private club, and gated community. Many planners are now trying to reintroduce truly public space, as in New York City's unique business/government Grand Central Partnership, which helped transform Bryant Park on 42nd Street from a "needle park" into an oasis of green, a lunch and cultural mecca.

Fred Kent of the Project for Public Spaces cites a hugely popular new neighborhood that has sprouted up around New York City's Union Square as a result of the highly successful farmers' market there. It's a symbiotic and organic process, he says. The loft housing available in the neighborhood was another catalyst, as was an important transit stop and effective traffic engineering. Now there are a host of renovations and new businesses. Urban planners need to build on the natural processes in communities, says Kent, rather than impose new projects on them.

One of the best examples of returning civic space to the public may be a plan for Portsmouth, Virginia, in which Urban Design Associates of Pittsburgh redesigned several



New York City's Bryant Park, a former "needle park," has been reclaimed for a wide variety of public uses.