2. NEIGHBORHOOD FRIENDLY STREETS AND PATHS

The Neighborhood Model proposes that road design addresses character and appearance as well as design speed and capacity. Specifically, streets should 1) be narrower, 2) include streetscape elements such as street trees, 3) provide paths for pedestrians and bicyclists, 4) allow better distribution of traffic, and 5) accommodate potential public transportation connections. These changes would make transportation routes work better for all citizens, not just those in cars.

Roads make up the largest component of public open space. Typically, traffic engineers have designed roads based on capacity. Less recognized is how much roads influence the character of an area and how much they are a setting for human activity.

Reducing required street widths has a number of advantages. Narrower pavement area can enhance property values, provide public amenities, do less environmental damage, and increase pedestrian safety. Alleys, for example, greatly improve the network without requiring wide pavement.

Providing just as good a network for bicyclists and pedestrians makes long-term sense, particularly in combination with planned public transportation connections. Bike paths can be sited along roads and also as part of greenways or other path systems. Steep terrain for example, can make pedestrian paths a sensible alternative to excessive roadcuts.

Figure 2:9 Chevy Chase, Maryland demonstrates many of the principles of the Neighborhood Model as it pertains to the making of well-defined streets in an American context. Any number of elements, including a row of street trees, and a white picket fence at the property line defines the space of the street. In addition, the house is set close enough to its front property line so that conversation between passersby is possible when people are seated on the front porch.
Advantages of Reduced Road Width:

Reduced water pollution. Roadways are a major contributor of erosion and water pollution and narrower streets have less impervious surface than wider streets.

Enhanced Pedestrian Safety. In some instances, narrow residential streets may be safer than wider ones. Drivers tend to drive slower when streets are narrower. Slower speeds give drivers more reaction time to avoid accidents, and reduce the severity of injury when there are accidents.

Reduced Cost. Reducing pavement width should produce a pro-rata savings on the cost of the road. Clearing and grading costs also would be less, as would long-term maintenance.