



Creative Solutions
FOR
Thriving Communities

CENTRALINA COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

REGIONAL CONFERENCE

Aging in the Suburbs



GROWING Jobs and Our Economy | CONTROLLING Cost of Government | IMPROVING Quality of Life

Aging in the Suburbs: Changes in the Built Environment That Support Well-Being and Mobility as We Age

Brian J. Morton (UNC-CH)

Elizabeth Shay (App. State)

Cherie Rosemond (UNC-CH)

Session Take-Aways

- Aging in community should be a goal of public policy
- To fully support aging in community, typical suburbs must be radically reimagined and changed
- Even so...small improvements are still improvements, and do not necessarily foreclose larger improvements
- Process of reimagining should include not just one neighborhood but multiple neighborhoods
- Start with “tactical suburbanism”

Aspiration:

A built environment that supports aging in community

What is the built environment?

- Exterior public realm – tangible elements
 - Paths, sidewalks, and roads
 - Greenways, parks, public gardens, and arboretums
 - Plazas, town squares, and town greens
 - Farmers' markets
 - Community food gardens
 - Houses, stores, and many other types of buildings
- Exterior public realm – ambient air
 - Smog (tropospheric ozone)
 - Fine particulate matter, including diesel particulate matter

AGING IN COMMUNITY OCCURS WHEN OLDER ADULTS...

- Live safely, comfortably, and free of loneliness, boredom, and helplessness...
- In single-family homes, shared housing, clustered housing, condominiums, or cohousing
- Receive compassionate care at home, in day care, or in a neighborhood eldercare home
- Claim their role as elders
- And...

AGING IN COMMUNITY OCCURS WHEN OLDER ADULTS...

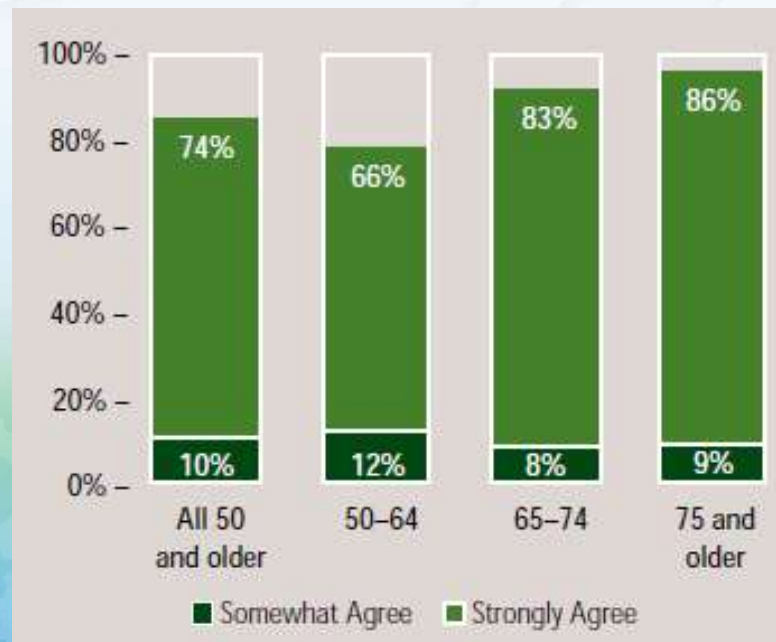
- Reside in multigenerational neighborhoods that provide:
 - social connections
 - relief for caregivers
 - older adults with opportunities to supplement their income (barter economy)
 - affordable housing to home care aides
- Are not exposed to injurious concentrations of ambient air pollutants
- And...

AGING IN COMMUNITY OCCURS WHEN OLDER ADULTS...

- Travel safely and comfortably in the neighborhood and the encompassing region
- Use a transportation system that accommodates the physical, sensory, and cognitive impairments experienced by many older adults
- Safely negotiate travel using wheelchairs, slow electric vehicles, canes, and walkers.

Aging in Place

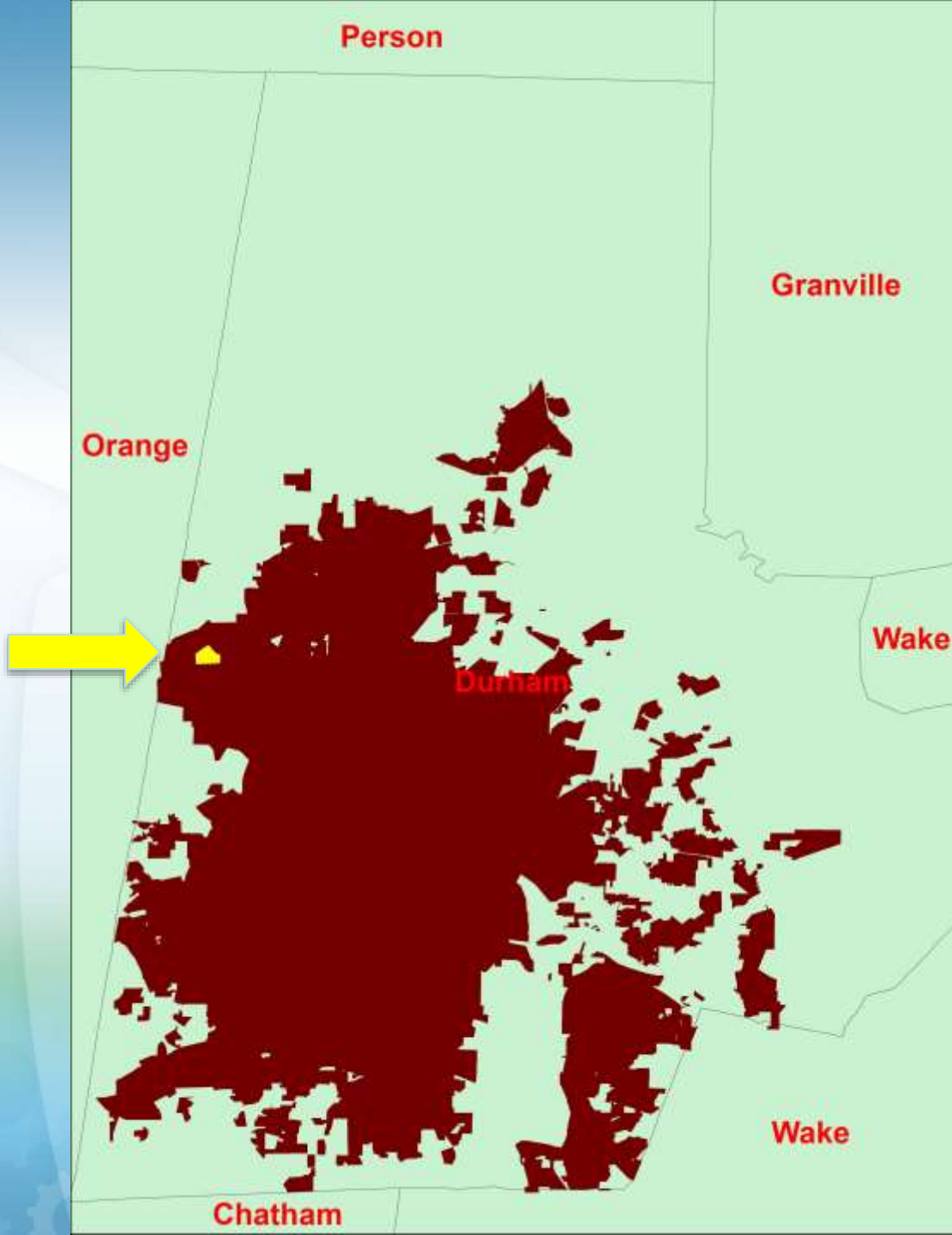
“Now I’d like to ask a question about your home. Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: ‘What I’d really like to do is stay in my current residence for as long as possible.’”



Aging in Community Complements Aging in Place

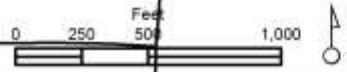
- Aging in place is centered on dwellings and private consumption
 - Private building interior: door widths, grab bars, motion sensors, etc.
 - Private building envelope: single story, stepless entry, electronic locks, etc.
 - Purchase of in-home healthcare and assistance
- Aging in place does not intrinsically encompass neighborhood-scale or town-scale features
- Aging in community is centered on neighborhoods and people working together outside of conventional commercial institutions

Archer Woods Today



Cole Mill Road

Archer Woods





Basic Facts About Archer Woods

- 1970s residential subdivision with red-brick ranches and split levels of about 1,700 - 2,100 sq. ft. on ½ acre lots
- Walk Score is 5 (out of 100)
 - Convenience store ½ mile away
 - City park 1 mile away
- 1,934 persons at least 65 years old in Archer Woods and in nearby neighborhoods in Durham County*
- 2,509 persons between 45 and 65 years old in Archer Woods and in nearby neighborhoods in Durham County*

How well does Archer Woods support aging in community?

- On the positive side, it is not hostile to bicycling, and air quality is healthful
- Zoning code prohibits certain housing options, at least these:
 - Smaller than 400 square feet (heated floor area), although G.S. 160A-383.5 clears the way for “temporary family health care structures” not larger than 300 gross square feet
 - Tiny houses built on trailers – if they would be considered to be “travel trailers” or “recreational vehicles”
- Car is required to safely travel outside the neighborhood
- No parks, neighborhood gardens, or any kind of neighborhood center

Reimagining Archer Woods (1)

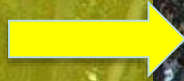
Small But Important Changes:

Accessory Dwelling Units

Palette of Accessory Dwelling Units



Granny
flat





Tiny house, 392 sq. ft.



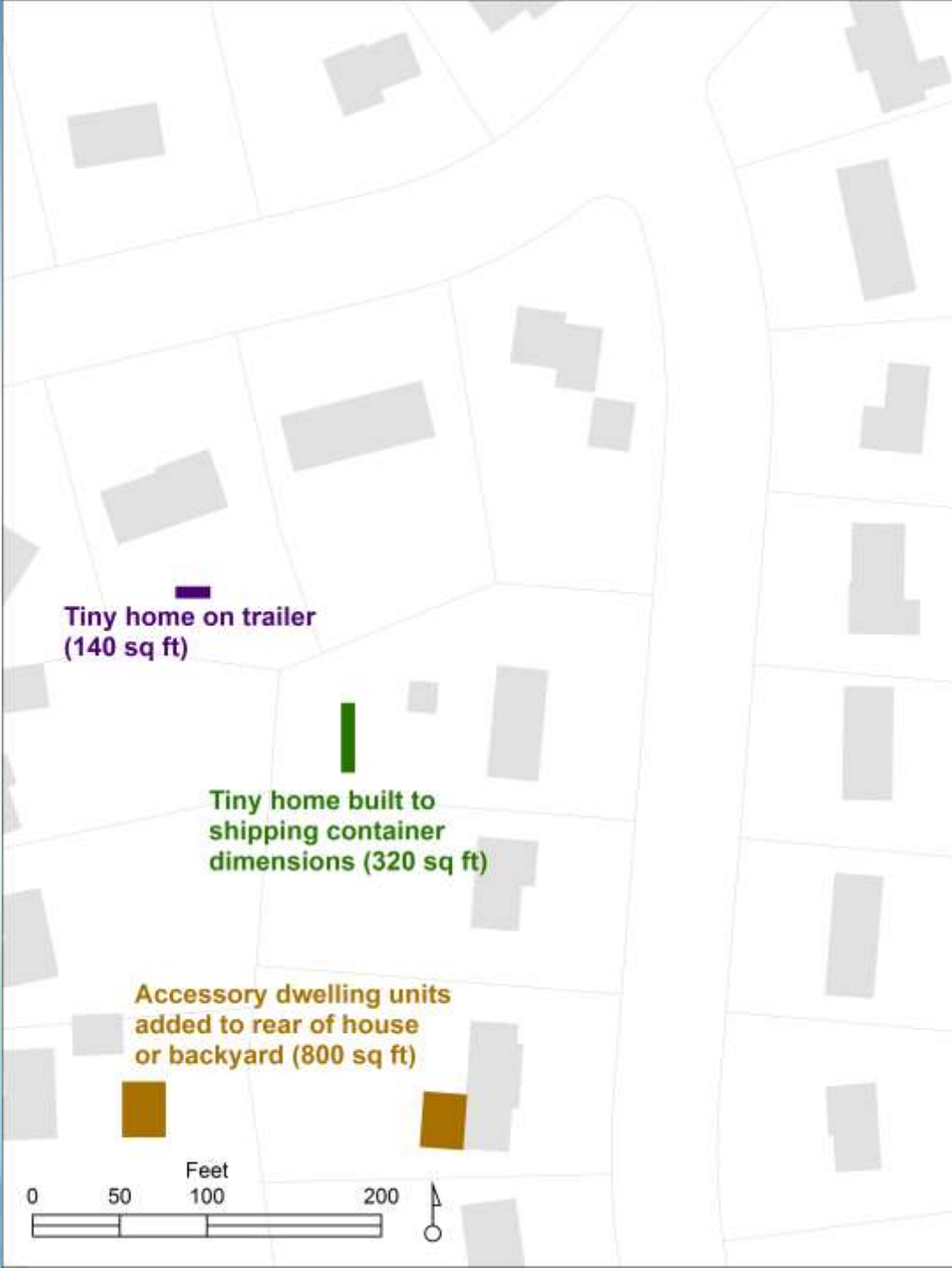
Tiny house on 20 ft. trailer, 131 sq. ft. downstairs



House made from a shipping container, 320 sq. ft. interior



MEDCottage, 299 sq. ft.



Assessment of “Small But Important Changes” Scenario

- Accessory dwelling units would be barely visible from the street
- Modifications are impermanent and can be undone in minutes or hours
- Housing choices have improved for older adults and home care aides
- But...
 - People still have to walk in the street
 - Home-by-home improvements do not benefit the larger neighborhood

Reimagining Archer Woods (2)

More Ambitious Changes:

**Daytime Eldercare Center or
Eldercare Home
Plus Sidewalks and
Simple Gathering Places**



Neighborhood-Scale Adult Daycare Facility
(Daytime Eldercare Center)



Neighborhood-Scale Assisted Living Facility
(Eldercare Home)



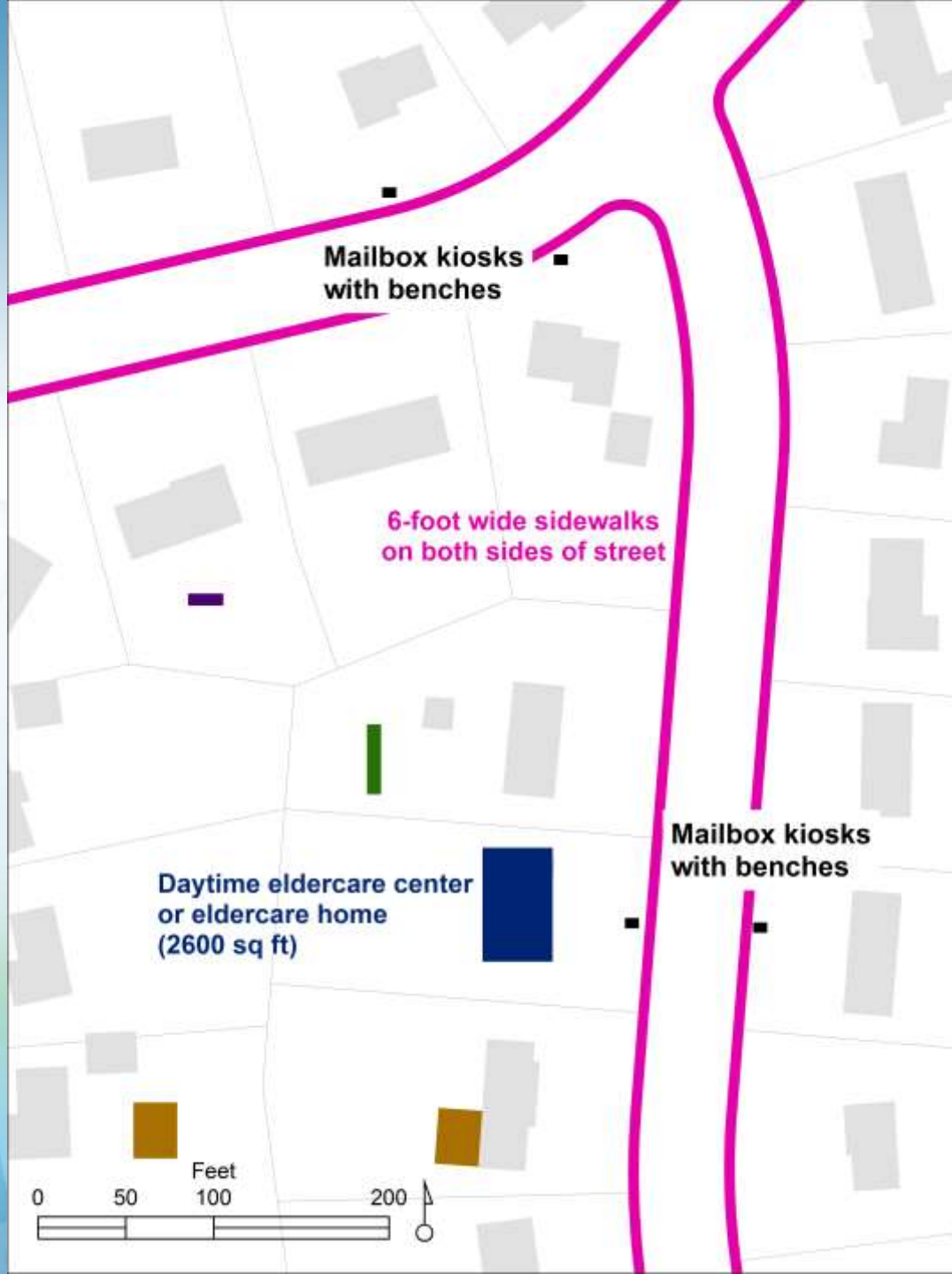
Sidewalk wide enough for two persons side-by-side



Glow in the dark sidewalk



Mail box kiosk with benches



Assessment of “More Ambitious Changes” Scenario

- Supports physical activity and social interaction
- Older adults can walk and travel using walkers and wheelchairs safely and side-by-side, even at dawn or dusk
- Kiosks offer resting places and opportunities for spontaneous social interaction

Reimagining Archer Woods (3)

Radical Transformation: Suburban Eldercare Green



Community garden



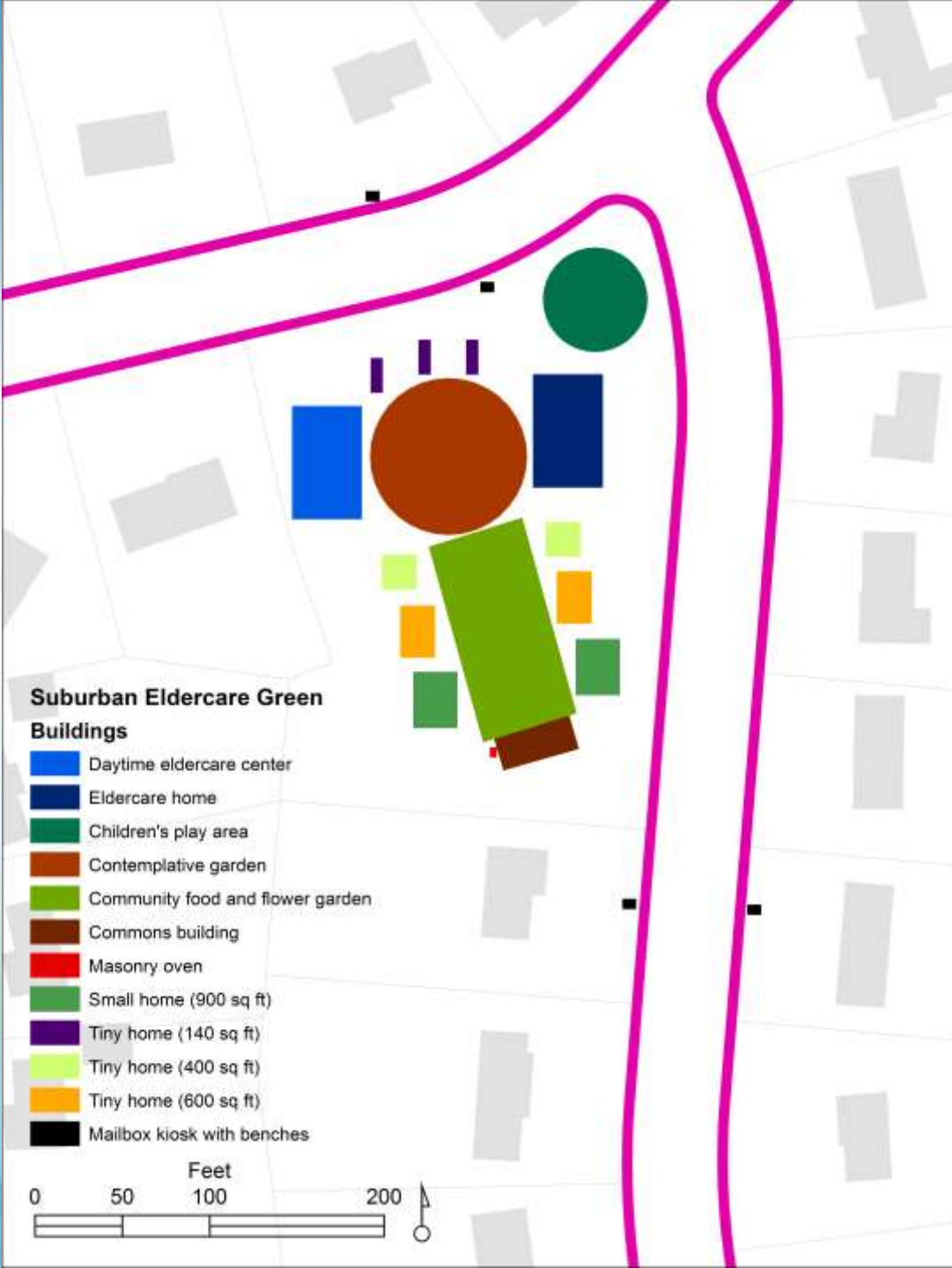
Contemplative and restorative public space



Pocket neighborhood, with community green and commons building



Children's play area with fountain

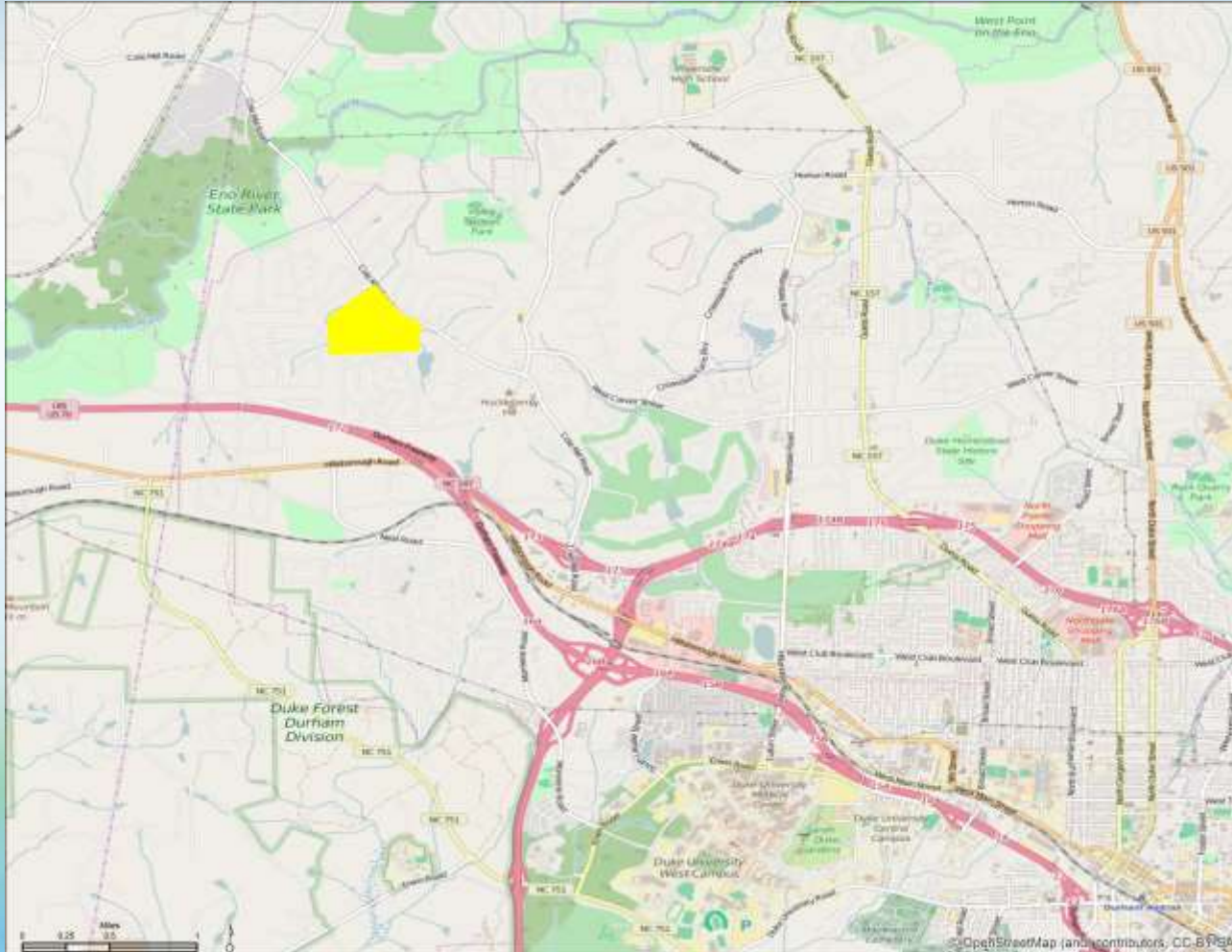


Assessment of Suburban Eldercare Green

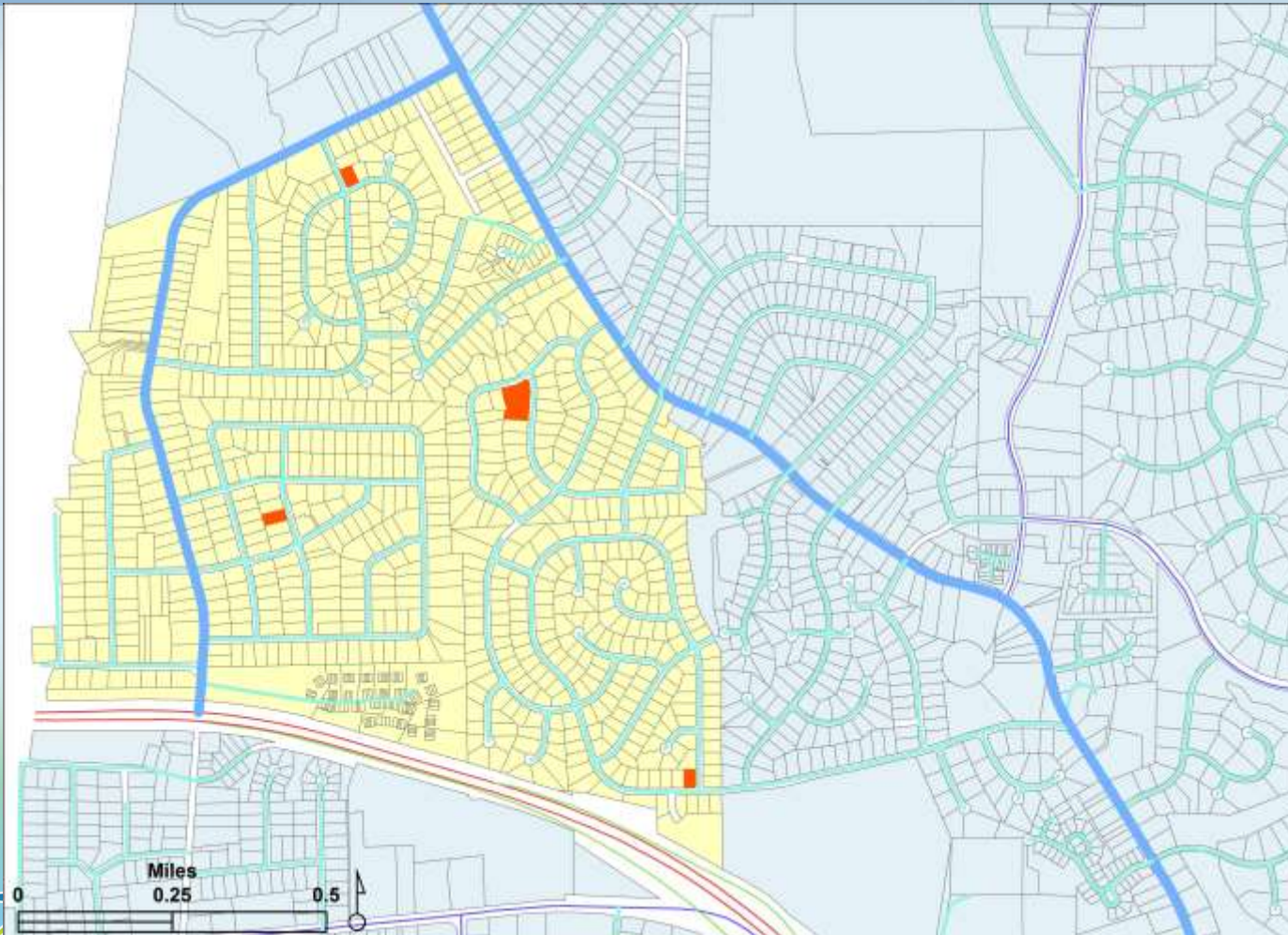
- Diverse housing options
- Multigenerational social interaction
- Gardens offer physical therapy, social interaction, reduce out-of-pocket expenditures on food, etc.
- Helps older adults and caregivers deal with very uncomfortable or tragic incidents of advanced age
- Affordable and nearby housing for home care aides

Several Additional Design Considerations (To-Do List)

How to connect Archer Woods to the rest of Durham with an elder-friendly transportation system?



Which other neighborhoods should have Eldercare Greens?



How should contiguous neighborhoods be connected in an elder-friendly manner?



Imagine an Eldercare Green in “tactical urbanism” style





Pop-up Eldercare Green in parking lot of a vacant building near Archer Woods

Conclusion

Most Important Points

- Aging in community should be a goal of public policy
- To fully support aging in community, typical suburbs must be radically reimagined and changed
- Even so...small improvements are still improvements, and do not necessarily foreclose larger improvements
- Process of reimagining should include not just one neighborhood but multiple neighborhoods
- Elder-oriented tactical suburbanism could be a fun and powerful way to start process of reimagination