

Symposium: Understanding exurban landscape change processes: Human preferences, agent behaviors and ecological effects

Paper 5

The effect of neighbors and neighborhood on ecological design preferences

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To test the validity of our conceptual model of homeowner decisions to purchase different types of new exurban residential developments in southeastern Michigan, we conducted a web-based survey of 494 southeast Michigan homeowners who lived in areas that were dominated by large lot zoning as identified by municipal boundaries. This survey asked homeowners to rate their preferences for simulated images of the different subdivision types included in our expert typology. It also presented a range of ecologically beneficial and conventional designs finer scale residential development features: open spaces, streets, yards, and allowed respondents to choose their most preferred new house for a large-lot exurban residential development. To test the effect of neighbors' yard types on homeowners' preferences for ecologically beneficial alternatives, we randomly assigned each respondent to one of three neighbors' yard treatments: all conventional, all ecologically beneficial, or a mix. Neighbors' yard styles significantly affected homeowners' preferences ($p < .000$) for both conventional yard styles and ecologically beneficial yard styles. In fact, the relative rank (first and last) of the most conventional and most ecologically beneficial yard styles reversed to match neighbors' yard styles. We concluded that other homeowners' decisions could profoundly influence individual homeowners to choose more ecologically beneficial subdivision and home landscape designs.