


## Chapter II – The Design Brief

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Normally, when a subdivision is first proposed, a design brief is established by the customer. Usually that customer is an investor or an investor-developer who borrows the money to buy the land, secure subdivision approval, and either develop it or sell it off to a developer-builder. Very early on in the process, the design brief is established.

 *This marks the place where we shift the process.*

On the front book flap of architect Christopher Alexander's *A Pattern Language*, he writes "...people should design for themselves their own houses, streets and communities. This idea may be radical (it implies a radical transformation of the architectural profession) but it comes simply from the observation that most of the wonderful places of the world were not made by architects but by the people."

We ask "How can we enable people to do their own design within the context of building a five to ten thousand population community with thousands of homes, offices, shops and public buildings?" Answer: model train set. Build that over-the-top train set that someone's dad built in the basement. Don't put in trains or tracks, but build a 100:1 scale model of the Village. Make the buildings movable. Move them around in a collaborative dialogue until the design looks right. Then reduce it to paper – that becomes the brief and the master plan for zoning approval. Keep the architects in the room, their skills and expertise is essential to a project of this magnitude. As Christopher Alexander suggests this will radically transform their profession.

### **The design brief as a vernacular process.**

Under normal circumstances, authority for the design brief lies with the customer. In many cases the architect or master planner drives the design brief by holding a series of meetings with the customer, listening to the customer's ideas, going away to make drawings, and coming back with new ones until the customer finally agrees and signs off. In high-profile jobs, architects may seek to plant their artistic stamp on the project, convincing the customer to accept a design brief that the architect hopes will be prize winning. With the normal time pressures of business, and especially of borrowed money, the parameters considered when creating the design brief are often truncated.

We propose that the design brief process take longer, that it embraces the five elements of quality of life (economic, social, cultural, environmental, spiritual) in a thorough manner and that we create tools for the real customer – the people who will actually live in the Village – that enable them to provide for their own collective well being. We propose this to give the Village a true sense of authenticity (see page 35-37 for a discussion of authenticity).

Because these people are not professionals, we create *Vernacular Tools*. In testing various tools, we found some non-professionals have difficulty reading architectural drawings or visualising computer generated renditions. The same information placed on a 100:1 scale model, with three-dimensional scale model buildings, streets and open space becomes instantly accessible to almost all. We then take timeless patterns and reduce them to business card sized fridge-magnets, printed on an ordinary ink-jet printer, and have the non-professionals work with them on large magnetic white boards (see p 152). With these two simple tools, we enable non-professional people to create the design brief for their community. Not by themselves, of course – we draw upon all the professional expertise any major development project would. It's just that we change the working relationship between the professionals and the people who will live in the Village.

When we provide a tool set for the customer to develop a design brief, the first thing that changes is the relationship between the professionals, who receive the design brief, and the real client: the people who will live there; who will live with the results. To make this process clearer, we name these future residents as "Founders" and we group all the professionals, be they architects, planners, engineers, designers, bankers, and the like, with the name of "Mentors"

How to become a Founder: To participate as a Founder in the design process you must have signed a letter of intent that you wish to buy into the Village, and you must have provided evidence of ability to pay for your property – a financial statement or mortgage qualification approval letter.