



Ten Principles for
Reinventing
America's
Suburban Strips



Urban Land
Institute

Ten Principles for Reinventing America's Suburban Strips

Michael D. Beyard

Michael Pawlukiewicz



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About ULI—the Urban Land Institute

ULI—the Urban Land Institute is a nonprofit education and research institute that is supported by its members. Its mission is to provide responsible leadership in the use of land in order to enhance the total environment.

ULI sponsors education programs and forums to encourage an open international exchange of ideas and sharing of experiences; initiates research that anticipates emerging land use trends and issues and proposes creative solutions based on that research; provides advisory services; and publishes a wide variety of materials to disseminate information on land use and development. Established in 1936, the Institute today has more than 16,000 members and associates from more than 50 countries representing the entire spectrum of the land use and development disciplines.

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Preface

Recently, the focus of leading-edge metropolitan planners has begun to shift from reinventing America's downtowns to reinventing its newer concentrations of commercial growth—its suburban strips. This shift reflects the growing success of many downtown revitalization efforts—a success based on decades of public/private partnerships, planning, investment, and development. It also recognizes that the ways to revitalize downtowns now are largely agreed upon.

The shift of focus reflects a further reality. Current patterns of growth and development along America's suburban commercial strips are unsustainable. The aggregate effects of well-performing commercial developments that are geographically close but not physically integrated are becoming untenable. As problems increase in older suburban corridors, and as consumer shopping patterns change, the future of strip development is becoming less certain.

Increasingly, suburbanites are calling for a greater sense of community and convenience in their lives, and the Urban Land Institute believes that these demands challenge the continuing competitiveness and sustainability of aging suburban strips. To this end, it has developed ten smart growth principles to help suburban strips evolve in ways that meet the market demands of the new economy, the new consumer, and the new face of retailing.

While suburban strips often represent incredible economic vitality—they are, after all, the places where most Americans shop—they are *terra incognita* in terms of understanding the ways they are evolving, the forces that are buffeting

them, the shapes they are taking, and the roles they will play in the new economy. They have largely been ignored as places for serious study, and their fate usually has been left to the marketplace with few models of how future growth should be channeled and coordinated comprehensively to make communities more livable.

What we do know about suburban strips is apparent to anyone who visits them: typically, they are one-dimensional forms of development that lack a distinct sense of place or community and that increasingly are plagued by problems to do with frag-



mentation, congestion, inconvenience, inefficiency, deterioration, and visual blight. Created in a generally laissez-faire environment well suited to the first-generation, low-density scale of postwar suburbia, they are no longer suited to the denser, more complex urban context of metropolitan America. While a single automobile-oriented shopping center is easily accessible, dozens lined along the same suburban arterial are not. Consumers continue to shop there, of course, but in the coming years, increasing choices will undoubtedly force major changes in the strip environment if they are to retain their competitive position and economic vitality.

Already the new face of retailing is beginning to change the how, when, where, and why of shopping, which will have profound implications for suburban strips. Today's consumers have unprecedented options—and these options continue to increase, not only in shopping centers and stand-alone stores but also in specialized locations, including resurgent downtowns and suburban downtowns, new town centers, mixed-use developments, streetfront shopping, transit stops, train stations and airports; off-price entertainment megamalls; and historic, cultural, sports, and entertainment districts. A common thread running through many of these options reflects an increasing connectivity to other aspects of daily life; a mix of activities; a stronger sense of community; and more attention to the environment, the experience, and the enjoyment of shopping. These characteristics are in tune with what today's consumers are looking for but not finding in most suburban strips.

The advent of nonstore shopping through the Internet, which offers convenience, competitive prices, and a wide selection of merchandise, increases the pressure even more for changes in the strip environment since the strip has offered these same elements—although less efficiently. In an overbuilt market, increasingly populated by sophisticated shoppers with better options, the competitive position of strip centers will gradually be eroded unless there is a significant rethinking of their role, a repositioning of their offerings, and a restructuring of their physical layout to reflect the more



mature nature of the communities that surround them. This erosion will not happen overnight, but to the extent that convenience disappears from the strip, the changes will be hastened.

As part of its mission to examine cutting-edge issues and propose creative solutions for improving the quality of land use and development, the Urban Land Institute sponsored a charrette on smart growth solutions leading off a series of forums seeking solutions to specific land use and growth management problems. The goal of these forums is to find ways to accommodate growth that enhance the economy, protect the environment, and preserve and improve a community's quality of life.

During three days of intensive study of three strips in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area, teams of planning and development experts from around the country toured and studied three very different suburban strips. The teams were made up of leading commercial developers, public planners, architects, economic consultants, transportation specialists, and property advisers.

The three strips were chosen as representative of different prototypes of suburban commercial environments. Rockville Pike in Montgomery County, Maryland, is a booming, mature strip plagued by legendary traffic congestion; the Route 1 corridor in Fairfax County, Virginia, represents an older deteriorating strip bypassed by the market; and Route 301 in Charles County, Maryland, represents an emerging exurban strip facing first-generation development pressures. ULI believes that the lessons learned from these very diverse strips can be applied to strips in every city in America.

ULI teams were assigned to each strip and given the following tasks: to identify the critical issues and challenges that strips face; to determine the most effective ways to reinvent strips to ensure their long-term competitive position; and to set strategic principles to guide suburban planners and developers in this effort. These principles were consolidated and refined by the three teams so that they could be applied universally to all types of suburban strip development. ULI had the support and participation of the three county governments in whose jurisdictions the strips were located. Each provided detailed briefing books, presented background information, and led tours of their strips. A presentation outlining the teams' findings and recommendations was made in Washington, D.C., on June 2, 2000, to county officials, developers, and other invited guests.

Ten Principles

- 1 Ignite Leadership and Nurture Partnership
- 2 Anticipate Evolution
- 3 Know the Market
- 4 Prune Back Retail-Zoned Land
- 5 Establish Pulse Nodes of Development
- 6 Tame the Traffic
- 7 Create the Place
- 8 Diversify the Character
- 9 Eradicate the Ugliness
- 10 Put Your Money (and Regulations) Where Your Policy Is

1 Ignite Leadership and Nurture Partnership

Local government and the business community, working together, must create a smart growth partnership to envision what they want their strips to become, to construct strategies for achieving their vision, and to develop detailed plans for implementing the changes that are needed to accommodate growth. To be successful, partnerships must include individual citizens, local interest groups, landowners, shopping center representatives, retail and residential tenants, and local planning and economic development agencies.

Public and private leaders must encourage the stakeholders to debate alternatives to their strips and decide how they should evolve. Too often, stakeholders have difficulty seeing beyond what currently exists and envisioning alternatives that would create a more livable environment. Strong leadership and imagination are required to motivate them to move ahead, recognizing that suburban strips are immature forms of development that can be improved as they grow.

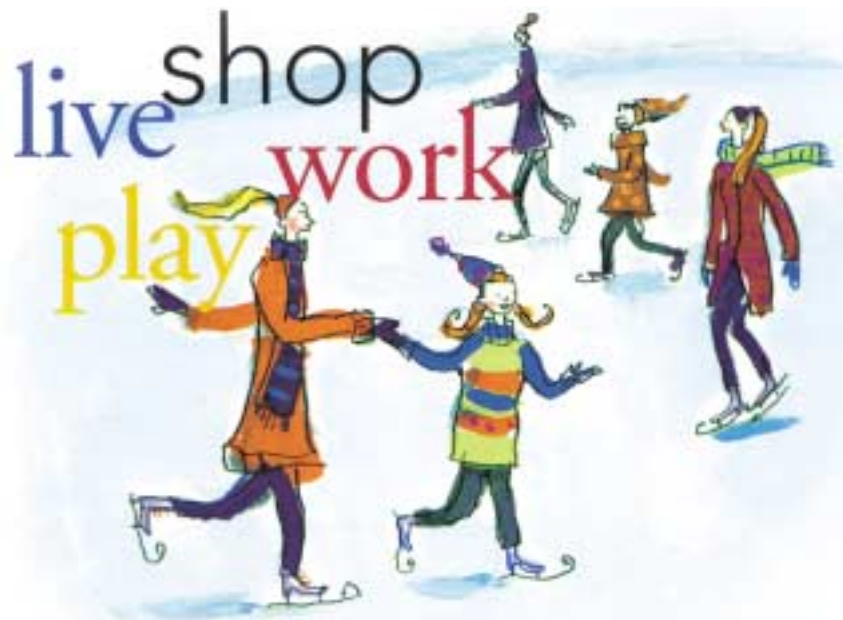
Successful partnerships to reinvent suburban strips require the creation of formal planning and management entities that are subordinate to but separate from the governmental agencies responsible for the larger community or county. Such management entities need to take over “ownership” of a strip and manage its future. The public/private entity should be a nonprofit development corporation, a business improvement district, or a combination of the two. As it directs the

reinvention of the strip, the entity should perform the following functions:

- Reach consensus, with the active participation of the public and private stakeholders, on the community's vision of what the strip should become;
- Participate in the development and redevelopment of the strip consistent with the partnership's vision;
- Acquire, assemble, and parcel out land to permit new forms of infill development;



- Coordinate and participate in real estate development and infrastructure financing;
- Coordinate actions of public agencies that are responsible for government services;
- Stay on top of traffic issues and manage parking efficiently so that its presence does not dominate the landscape;
- Keep a steady hand on security matters and monitor and correct security problems as they arise;
- Coordinate the collection and dissemination of market, economic, social, demographic, and traffic data and information to prospective investors, developers, retailers, consumers, and public agencies; and
- Handle marketing and promotion.



great streets



2 Anticipate Evolution

What worked in the past may not work in the future. Although end-to-end shopping centers have become the norm along many suburban arterials, no one seriously believes that this format represents the most convenient, livable, or efficient long-term arrangement. What then *should* the evolving pattern of strip development look like in the coming decades?

The retail environment is changing rapidly as it looks for ways to stand out in a crowded marketplace and meet the expectations of increasingly sophisticated and jaded consumers. Intense competition from new shopping destinations and the threat posed by nonstore shopping alternatives have retailers constantly looking for new formats, innovative combinations of stores and entertainment,

mixed uses, and unusual retail environments and experiences. Increasingly, retail development is reconnecting with the larger community around it, becoming integrated into a total destination where people can participate even when they are not shopping.

These fundamental changes are being driven by market demographics that are evolving as rapidly as the retail environment. The population is aging. At the same time, younger people remain single longer, or many choose a single lifestyle or single parenthood. Those who marry tend to choose a two-career and two-income standard of living. And increased immigration, with many new people from diverse cultural backgrounds, is resulting in more cosmopolitan expectations. In response to this demographic sea change, retailing can be expected to take on a new face in place of the freestanding retail strips that were designed for a different time and a different consumer.

The new face of retailing will not appear overnight. However, as land values, densities, and congestion



increase along suburban strips, pressures gradually will mount for new development patterns and land uses to accommodate these changes. What can suburban strips do to anticipate this evolution and keep pace with market demands?

■ Be ready to respond to changing consumer preferences. For example, town centers currently are on the rise, and there is a growing interest in streetfront retail in pedestrian-friendly, walkable settings.

■ Adapt the strip to emerging lifestyles. Today, there is growing interest in mixing residential and retail uses in well-designed environments. Mixed-use projects can provide an attractive, convenient, and stylish setting for residents and a captive market for retailers.

■ Provide a sense of community by developing public gathering places, a more livable environment, and more convenience in daily life. This will require new types of housing products such as residential clusters, patio homes, zero-lot-line homes, and residences over shops.

■ Make new amenities available along the strip such as parks, recreational opportunities, entertainment and cultural activities, public services, and dining out.

■ As new community trends emerge, adopt measures to prevent the strip from becoming obsolete with out-of-date retail concepts and products.



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STARWOOD URBAN

3 Know the Market

All strips are not created equal. Each is at a different point in an evolutionary continuum that leads over time from a single low-density strip center to a complex mix of strip malls, power centers, regional malls, community centers, stand-alone big-box stores, and other commercial activities. In some cases, this process is short-circuited by more competitive locations or changing demographics. Some strips stop growing, deteriorate, and never reach their anticipated potential.



Specific solutions for an individual strip will vary widely depending upon the market; what will work in one type of strip may not be possible in another. Suburban strips without regional access will most likely reflect the demographics of the immediate trade area today and in the future, while those with regional access generally will serve multiple markets and have the potential to provide a more diverse retail mix in terms of product offerings and price points. An understanding of which markets are accessible and a realistic view of how these markets can best be served should guide revitalization and development plans.

Planning for the future of a suburban strip requires that a community know its market and understand its unique potential. The following assessment should be made:

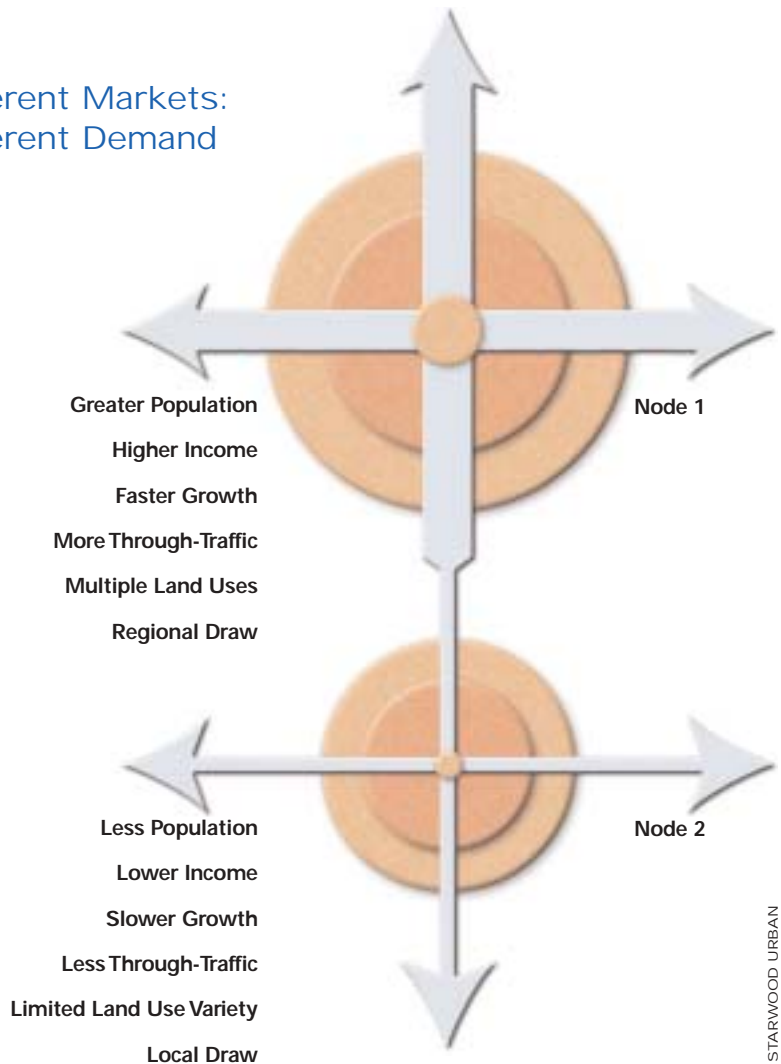




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- Identify the strip's trade area.
- Determine the specific market forces at work where the strip is located.
- Determine a realistic assessment of where the strip fits in the overall retail continuum, i.e., its level of maturity in the marketplace relative to other retail destinations, and the amount and nature of the competition.
- Determine the shopping patterns of the market and set reasonable expectations about how they are likely to evolve.
- Recognize that different types of arterials serve different types of markets, and be prepared to serve those markets that your arterial serves best.
- Build on the position that the strip holds in the regional hierarchy of retail locations, and be reasonable about what is economically feasible, which will change over time.
- Recognize that a corridor will likely be composed of many distinct neighborhoods with different populations, incomes, growth rates, and levels of access. These differences should lead to wide variations in activity and character along different parts of the strip.
- Understand the complex interplay between land values, densities, market demographics, access, demand for different types of retail offerings, and the level of competition in the strip's market area; in other words, know the market!

Different Markets: Different Demand



4 Prune Back Retail-Zoned Land

The zoning technique used by most suburban communities is to designate everything along the arterial highway strip for commercial uses and wait for retailers and developers to gradually fill in all of the individual sites. In this type of environment, new development sprawls outward even as sites closer to the city remain vacant and older retail centers deteriorate. Retail overzoning thus has had the effect of extending strips prematurely in discontinuous and inefficient ways as developers leapfrog over one another onto sites farther and farther away from the city.

When economic conditions change, as they constantly do, some strips, or parts of strips, are left to deteriorate even before they have been fully developed. This leaves them unfinished indefinitely, at risk to competition from newer and more enticing shopping environments, and difficult to revitalize because of their characteristic sprawl and lack of focus.

By pruning back the amount of land zoned for retail, suburban communities can stimulate retail growth, encourage revitalization, and improve the quality of their shopping strips. It simply is not necessary for every major parcel along every arterial to be zoned for commercial or retail use.

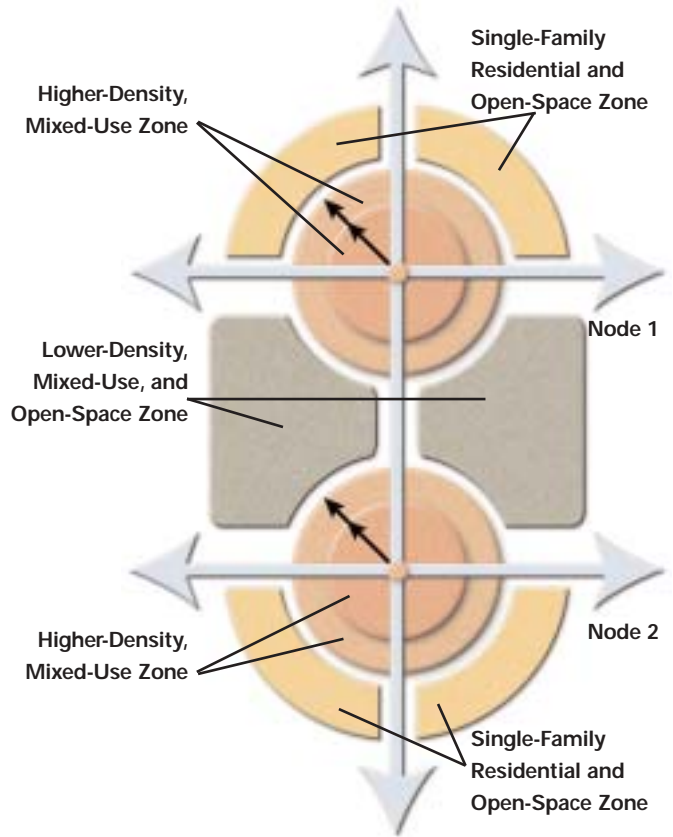
Suburban communities should take the following steps:

- Limit the quantity of commercially zoned land along emerging suburban strips to give landowners and retailers the incentive and economic strength to maintain a high-quality environment, react more swiftly to societal trends, and evolve on site as the retailing world changes.
- Rezone excess commercial land in older strips to encourage reinvestment and improve the quality of existing retail properties.

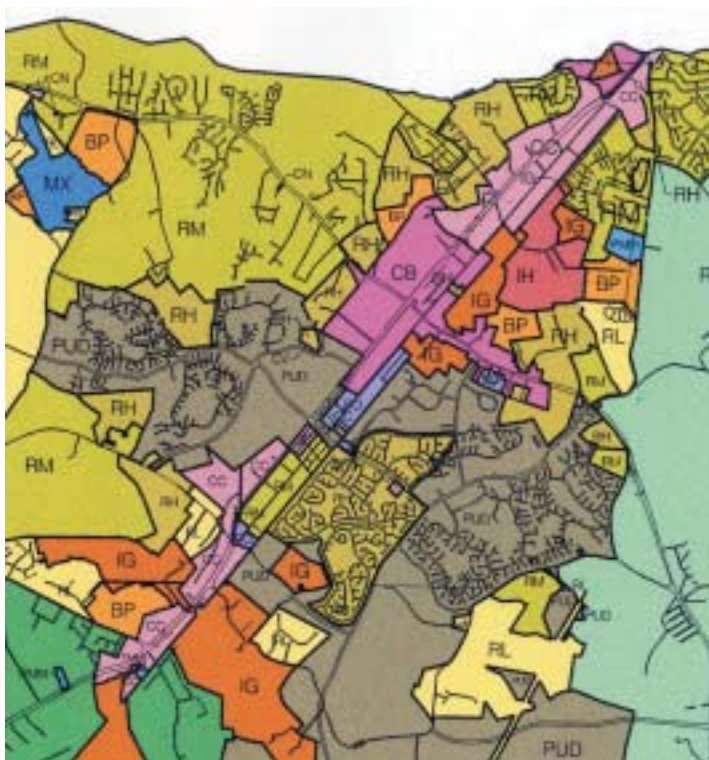


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Create Variety Along the Strip



- Scale retail-zoned land to reflect a realistic assessment of the size, strength, and character of the market.
- Stimulate infill, new forms of mixed-use, and pedestrian-oriented retail development on remaining retail-zoned land.
- Limit the extension of infrastructure—to prevent sprawl and congestion—as long as the existing infrastructure is underused.
- Structure zoning in mature strips to encourage denser forms of development that can be reached by multiple access modes.
- Reserve some of the previously zoned retail land for housing, office space, civic uses, recreational facilities, and open space.
- Reduce opportunities for and resist predatory behavior on the part of competing big-box retailers and centers.



Before rezoning.



After rezoning.

5

Establish Pulse Nodes of Development

The suburban strip has become the main street of shopping for most Americans because of its easy access to middle-class markets, its high visibility, its convenient parking, and its adaptability to large retail formats. However, strips face an enormous challenge as they try to maintain their economic vitality in a retail world now demanding environments that strips do not provide.



RTKL

The typical suburban strip today consists of mile after mile of repetitive, indistinguishable retail landscape. As a rule, the architecture is nondescript, with little concern for design features or cohesiveness, and it is scaled to be appreciated at automobile speeds. The strip reflects little, if anything, about the history or culture of the place where it is located. There is little hierarchy of space, land use, or form; and rarely is there a sense of place or community to which people are drawn as more than consumers. The strip typically has become an elongated one-dimensional environment, often looking much the same whether it is located in different parts of a metropolitan area or in different cities altogether.

This is not the new face of retailing, and it puts suburban strips at risk. To restructure the retail strip environment to overcome these market negatives, “pulses” of development must be created along the length of the strip. These peak nodes of high-intensity, mixed-use residential and commercial development should be interspersed with stretches of low-intensity land uses or open space.



RTKL

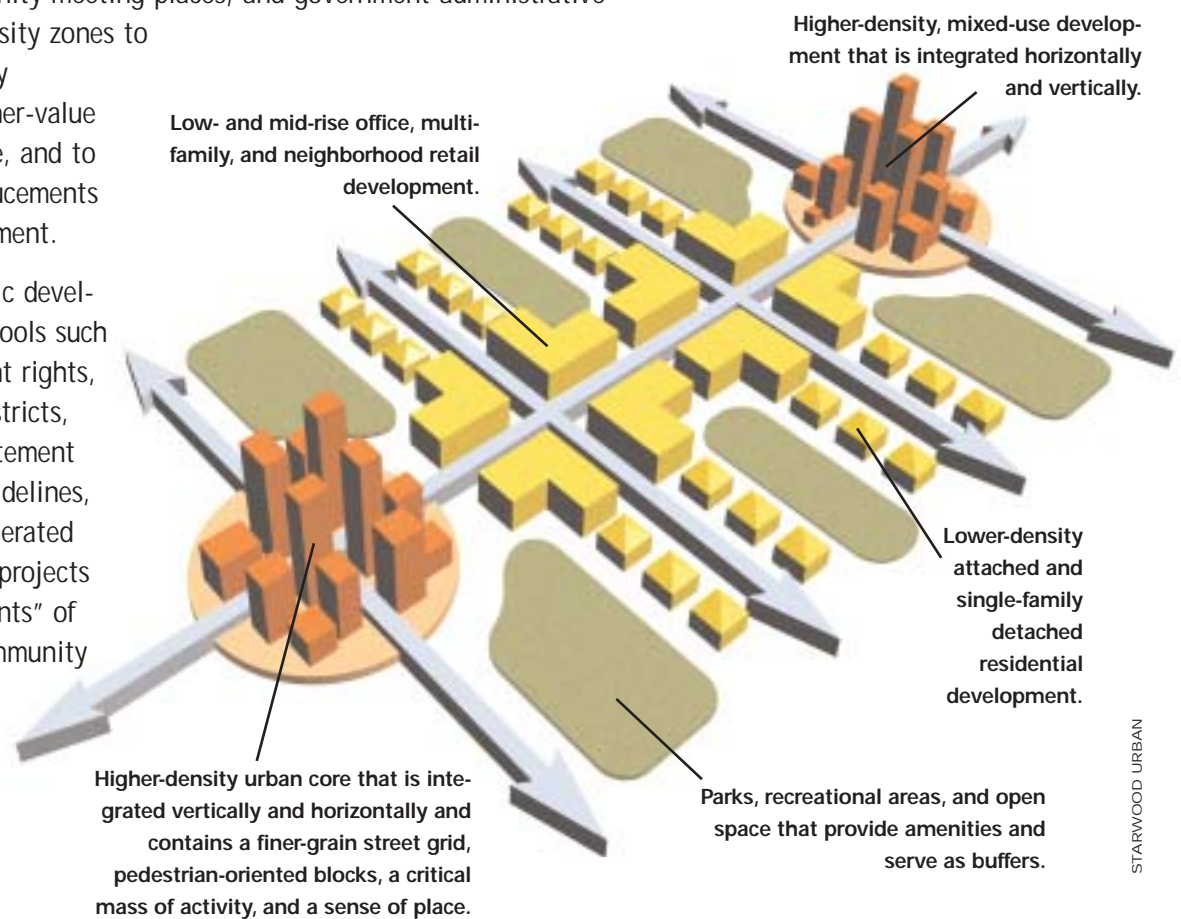
Pulses of development density along the suburban strip will create peaks and troughs of commercial activity that will pump new life into suburban strips.



How can pulse nodes be developed?

- Use key intersections or major transit stops to create cores of development that are unique points of reference; nodes of intense activity; and places that are friendly, attractive, and walkable—but that differ from each other in character, function, or purpose.
- Plan and zone higher densities in these nodes of development to facilitate vertical mixed use of three or more stories and to achieve pedestrian concentrations that create a lively, safe, attractive, and entertaining streetscape.
- Direct public investments and site public facilities such as libraries, schools, cultural facilities, community meeting places, and government administrative centers in the higher-density zones to raise surrounding property values, to encourage higher-value land uses within the zone, and to serve as anchors and inducements for spinoff private investment.
- Use the range of public development implementation tools such as transfer of development rights, business improvement districts, eminent domain, tax abatement policies, urban design guidelines, vertical zoning, and accelerated approval of development projects to achieve the “pulse points” of live/work, high-value community development.

Development Pulsing



6 Tame the Traffic

By its nature, suburban strip development is served primarily if not exclusively by the automobile and occurs where traffic is greatest. Consequently, every strip must balance a certain tension between accommodating through-trips and providing access to the activities and services of the strip itself. Traffic is, of course, the lifeblood of these activities since automobiles typically provide the only way to get to the strip or to get around. But too much traffic, or poorly

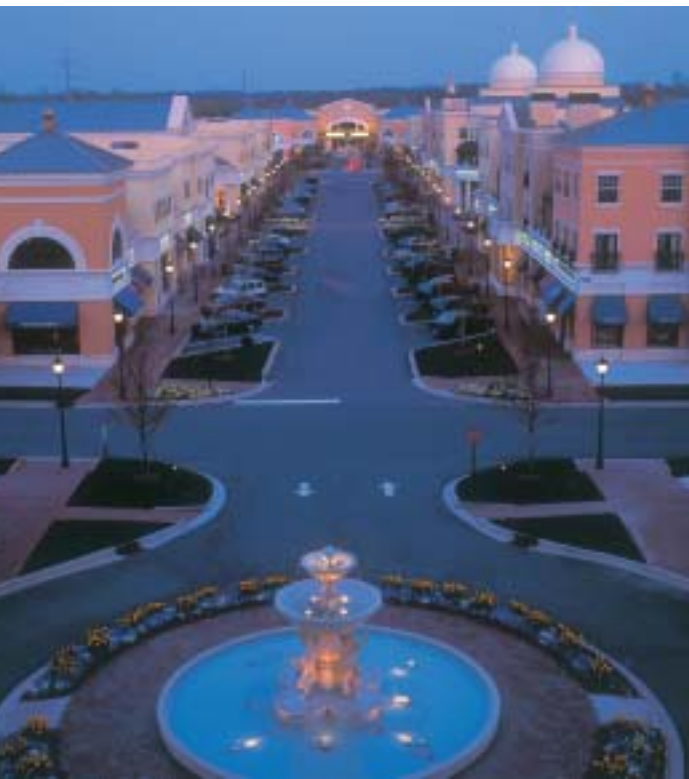
planned traffic, can strangle the strip, and congestion and inconvenience will cause shoppers to avoid it and shop somewhere else. When traffic counts reach 20,000 to 30,000 or more per day, visibility of the stores will be high and merchants will be happy, but access becomes increasingly difficult, and the strip is at risk. This is the situation that many suburban strips now face.

To ensure continued mobility, traffic planning and design must resolve the inherent conflict between through-traffic and traffic whose destination is the strip itself. In other words, traffic must be tamed and managed so that the goose that laid the golden egg is not killed. But this means different things in different places.

■ Decide whether the main arterial road should be a seam or an edge. A seam allows speeds ranging from 30 to 35 miles per hour and has up to six lanes with a median. As the term implies, a seam has the potential to knit the community together across the arterial. An edge, on the other hand, has eight or more lanes and speeds ranging from 45 to 55 miles per hour. It divides the community in ways that should be respected. While traffic can be tamed, within limits, along a seam, the community should in most cases accept an edge as an edge and not try to connect or integrate land uses, urban design, or community activities on both sides of the arterial.

■ Do not destroy the commercial vitality of the strip by taking too much traffic off it. Whatever solutions are chosen, they must ensure continuing ease of access to the commercial developments along the strip or they will wither and die. Transportation solutions must be scaled to the specific nature of the strip and balanced to serve multiple needs and multiple markets.

■ Plan for traffic volume and capacity to accommodate the needs of both through- and destination traffic; neither is going to go away. Where too much traffic and resulting conflict exist, the community must look for alternatives. Some options that might be appropriate would be separating traffic through the use of parallel local streets or frontage roads; limiting access points to commer-



cial development; linking parking lots; providing turn lanes; coordinating traffic signals; adding bus lanes, bikeways, and pedestrian links; and creating transit stops.

Automobile Access. Convenient access can make or break a strip. Too many curb cuts are inefficient and dangerous for drivers and pedestrians alike.

- Consolidate driveways and interconnect parcels so that automobile and pedestrian movement are possible without going out onto the arterial highway; halving the number of access points results in about a 30 percent decrease in the accident rate.
- Use supporting road systems and frontage roads to provide opportunities for parallel movement along the corridor.
- Design intersections and access points to simplify and coordinate signal sequences and to minimize congestion.
- Limit curb cuts to avoid excessive turning motions that snarl traffic; manage this process through zoning ordinances, design requirements, or comprehensive codes.
- Install innovative turning solutions to accommodate left turns and U-turns by looping from the right median to alleviate clogged intersections.



NEWHALL LAND AND FARMING COMPANY



Wide medians;
innovative turns.

EDAW

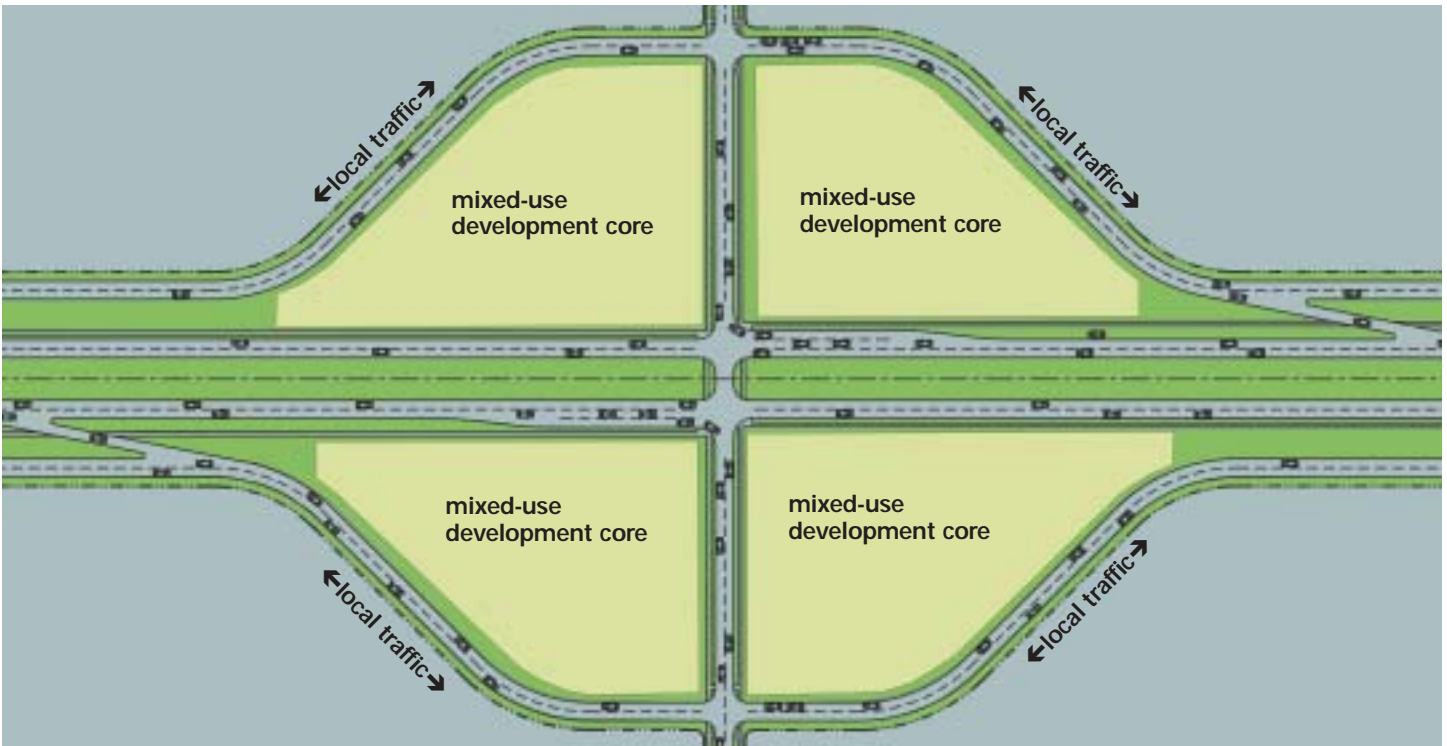


- Design and manage the strip to limit vehicular and pedestrian conflicts.

Parking. The success of strip commercial development is predicated on free and plentiful parking. Unfortunately, parking lots commonly dominate the landscape of the strip. Conventional practice requires that every development along the strip provide for all of its parking needs on its own site between its structure and the roadway, even though this is inefficient and contributes substantially to the wasteland aesthetics of today's commercial strip.

- Size prime parking lots and structures for reasonable demand; provide for peak parking in overflow areas.
- Encourage and plan for shared parking among adjacent uses.
- Consider the creation of a parking district to bring multiple facilities under common management and create greater efficiencies.
- Look for alternative parking and building configurations that provide convenience and avoid visual blight.
- Create parking in a carefully designed landscape.

Separation of through- and local traffic.



■ When justified by higher land prices, introduce structured parking to open up parking lots for new development in more urban settings.

■ Avoid charging for parking. It is inconsistent with the nature of a strip center and is likely to be effective only in exceptional circumstances.

Pedestrian Access. Commercial strips are not usually thought of as pedestrian environments, but pedestrian traffic seems to be evolving into an important tool to add to the attractiveness and economic vitality of suburban strips. Communities should recognize the importance of a pedestrian-friendly environment and reserve space to ensure that pedestrians can be accommodated. Pedestrian connections should be provided primarily within the pulse nodes of intense activity, among major activity centers, and along corridors that are designated for future retail growth. In most cases, it is preferable not to build pedestrian highway bridges or tunnels, since it is usually more convenient to cross at grade, and some people associate an element of danger with bridges or tunnels.

Transit. Transit stations obviously are not the solution to most strips' problems, but some strips have matured and densified enough to become urban places with opportunities for transit. In fact, it is the increased density that makes transit feasible and reduces dependence on the automobile. Although some low-density strips may always be auto dependent, transit can enhance the denser nodes of a "pulsed" strip and strengthen the market for residential and office development, adding to the strip's urban synergy. As a result, strip design, and even its location (where it is possible to plan for it), should be conducive to transit.



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7 Create the Place



People go to places that appeal to them on many levels. Ideally, all the senses are engaged—sight, smell, sound, touch, and taste. But it is the presence of other people and the ability to interact with and watch them in a safe and energized environment that creates the most memorable and successful places. As a result, diverse, well-conceptualized developments that are collocated with other well-conceptualized developments in a coordinated, entertaining, and lively environment are worth more in real estate value than stand-alone buildings in a sea of parking. This difference in value is called the “design dividend.” It is no surprise to discover that such places also maximize retail spending and rents and, as a consequence, capital value.

When people like a place, they will incorporate it into their daily lives, using it and enjoying it even when they have no expressed purpose for visiting it. Such a place will establish a sense of community that gives a focus to people’s daily lives. It will be a public place where they can conveniently and happily carry out their normal day-to-day activities without the inconvenience increasingly associated with suburban living.

The following steps should be taken to create suburban “places” that people like, feel comfortable in, and want to return to again and again. As a first phase, planning elements like these should be implemented in the densest nodes of activity. As the strip matures, these elements should be extended in line with the market to the commercial fringe.

- Create attractive walkways and continuous streetfront experiences to maximize the quality of the pedestrian environment and afford opportunities to increase retail spending.

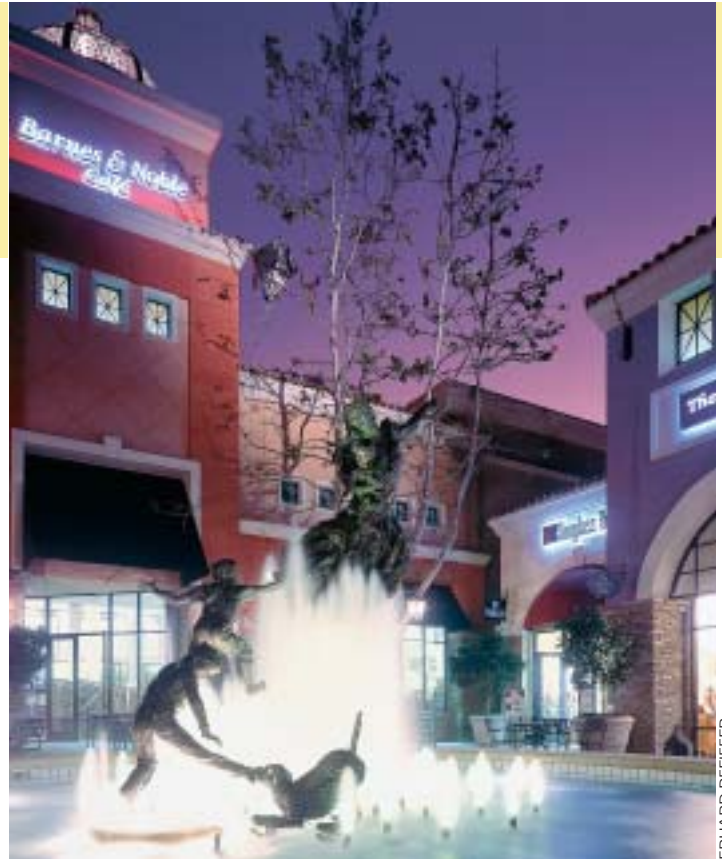
- Configure sidewalks so people feel safe and comfortable; make sidewalks wide, appealing, and shady.

- Provide a hierarchy of pedestrian-scaled, direct and indirect lighting (no sodium vapor lights, please!) that illuminates walkways, ensures safety, highlights buildings and landmark elements, and provides sight lines to other retail uses—such as a view from a café to cinemas, bookstores, and unique shops.



POST PROPERTIES

- Install well-designed, high-quality street furniture to reinforce the strong image and comfort of the place.
- Carefully place strong landscaping elements, including mature trees, to enhance the place but not detract from the retail sight lines.
- Vary roofscape and facade designs; retailers depend on diverse, appropriately scaled, and customized shopfronts.
- Use compelling, informative, and consistent signage to tell the story of the place.
- Design attractive corners and gateways to the development nodes.
- Add vitality by requiring active uses along the sidewalks such as outdoor dining (except along the arterial), interactive displays in shop windows, entertainment, and diverse architectural elements, styles, and setbacks.
- Ensure that getting to and from the site is enjoyable and efficient; entry routes are as important as the place itself.
- Deter crime by designing for security; ensure street-level vitality and plenty of “eyes on the streets.”
- Surround big boxes with “sleeves” of retail and service uses to minimize blank walls and dead spaces.
- When land values warrant, create structured parking; incorporate active retail or service uses at the first level to integrate parking structures with the retail environment.
- Provide all the services that a community needs, increase the number of choices encountered, and maximize the range of products sold.
- Incorporate a variety of urban residential uses in the form of live/work spaces, apartments above stores, townhouses, and hotels to ensure activity around the clock.
- Create a distinct place-making tool kit that includes townscape elements such as narrow streets to foster the creation of community destinations along the strip.



ERHARD PFEIFFER



STREET-WORKS

8

Diversify the Character

Suburban growth is inevitable, and as a society we can accommodate it in only two ways: through increased density or increased sprawl. There are simply no other choices. Today, public policy in many states is redirecting growth back into developed areas, which means that Americans are beginning to choose increased density. This choice provides enormous opportunities for suburban strips to remake themselves into new forms of community centers more attuned to the emerging needs of increasingly harried suburban residents.

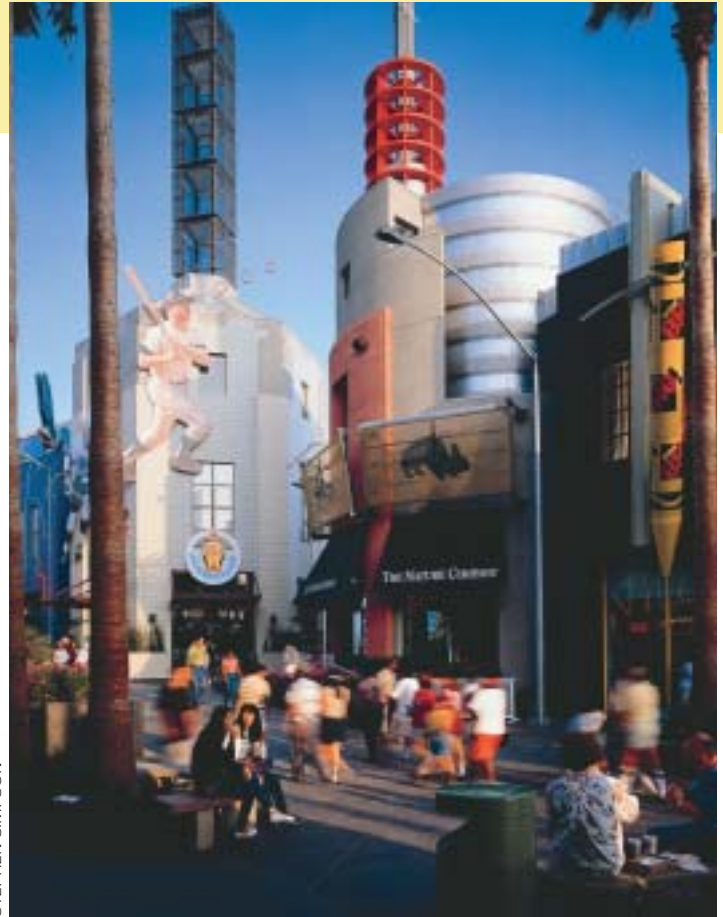


In some ways, these new suburban community centers will be unlike traditional town centers because of their more fragmented, low-density pattern of development and their reliance on the automobile. However, in other ways, they could reflect the best of metropolitan living: the convenience of mixed uses, increased choices more in tune with today's lifestyles, pedestrian environments, a multidimensional character, and varied densities that permit a complete range of goods and services that people depend on in their daily lives. And all of this will still be surrounded by the leafy, single-family neighborhoods that Americans love.

TBA ARCHITECTS

As development pressures increase and land values rise along suburban strips, the character of the strips should densify and diversify, and mixed-use development should become an essential part of this change. This will add a new and exciting diversity to the strip, bring new services, create a more lively human dimension, and reinforce a sense of place. To achieve the new diversity, developers and planners should:

- Create an environment in which people can live, work, shop, and play.
- Plan for different types of districts along the strip ranging from traditional, low-density strip shopping centers to denser and more urban nodes of activity.
- Accommodate a range of nonretail uses, including housing, hotels, offices, civic uses, and cultural, entertainment, and recreational activities.
- Arrange the diverse land uses in ways that encourage walking and discourage driving for short trips and errands.
- Rezone designated areas in mature strips for urban mixed-use projects and higher-density housing.
- Concentrate mixed uses along the major arteries to preserve single-family neighborhoods.
- Link the higher-density development districts, where appropriate, with commuter rail, subway, and light-rail stations.



STEPHEN SIMPSON



TBA+ ARCHITECTS

9 Eradicate the Ugliness

The distinguishing characteristic of suburban strips in the minds of most Americans is their undisguised ugliness (although congestion now runs a close second). This ugliness must be eradicated if suburban strips are to remain competitive and be successful in the future. Although this is not a hopeless task, as some believe, it will take a strong commitment from public and private sectors working in partnership to make it happen.

Enhancement of the physical environment heightens the anticipation and enjoyment of life's daily activities, especially shopping, being entertained, and eating out. In the new world of retailing, this means that shoppers want to be entertained in an environment that provides a memorable and enjoyable experience. Providing this type of environment makes people more likely to visit, stay longer, and return often—the retail trifecta. Not providing it means that they will go somewhere else at the first opportunity.

The ugliness of a suburban strip is apparent in many ways, from the overall first impression to the appearance of individual strips. The arterial is the entrance to the strip for most people. It sets the image of the strip and should be the place to start investing money on improvements. As the strip matures, secondary streets should become the focus of attention. Improvements to the public realm



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should be made as individual properties are developed and redeveloped.

To eradicate the ugliness of the strip, communities should:

- Strive harder for architectural excellence, higher-quality building design and retail-friendly, first-floor facades.
- Develop for each street a set of enforceable design guidelines designating types of pedestrian-scaled street-lamps, sidewalk pavers, tree types and sizes, signage, and landscaping.
- Landscape the main arterial with mature trees, plants in the median, and lush green areas along its edges.
- Work with the local utility and cable companies to place all power lines underground; maintenance, weather-related repair, and service disruption costs will be reduced.
- Be creative with parking by placing it in courtyards, behind buildings, above stores, and in innovative arrangements as properties are redeveloped in new and denser configurations; this will reduce the visual blight of endless parking lots.
- Design and landscape parking areas so that cars are in a park rather than that trees are in a parking lot.
- Create a secondary street pattern where appropriate, and modify setback requirements to pull retail and restaurant facilities close to the arterial and secondary streets.
- Plan for a pedestrian-friendly environment with appropriate signalization and crosswalks along the arterial and secondary streets; make sure sidewalks are wide enough for outdoor cafés.
- Encourage buildings that enclose and frame the corners of major intersections within the designated high-density zones in order to define and identify the strip.



SWA GROUP

10 Put Your Money (And Regulations) Where Your Policy Is

The public sector must be prepared to make investments and take actions to support its own public policies for reinventing suburban strips. For most strips, this represents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to set the stage for the kind of development that the community wants as the strip evolves. It is an



opportunity that cannot be missed, and the public agencies, working in partnership with the private sector, need to make sure that a comprehensive, incremental improvement program actually happens. This can be done by making capital investments that achieve multiple purposes; for example, improve traffic flow, coordinate access management and parking, enhance the aesthetic and environmental realm, and increase pedestrianization in a holistic way. This will bring about the kind of private investment that the public is demanding.

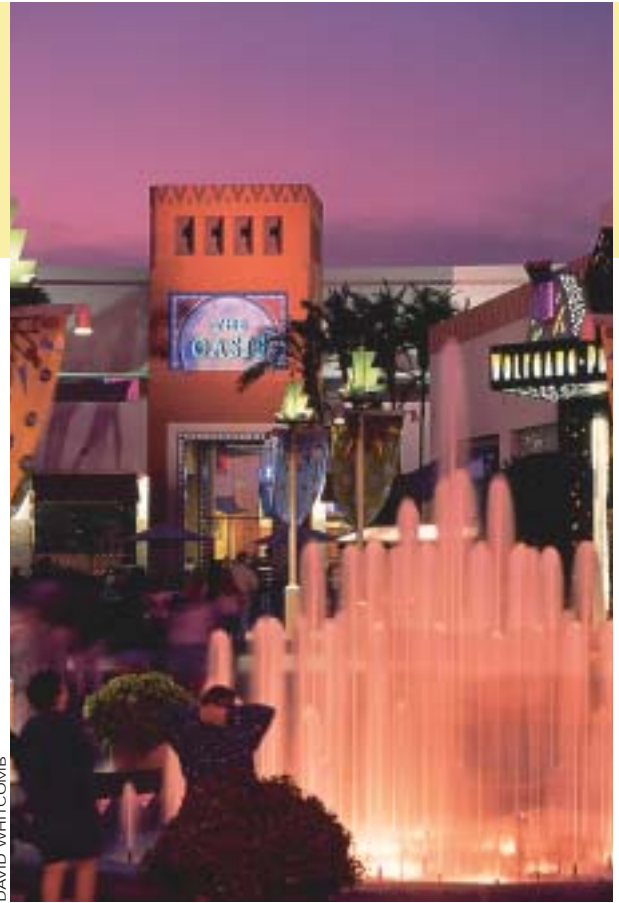
A comprehensive plan, an urban design plan, traffic plans, and market studies provide the tools for formulating strategies for successful strip revitalization, but they are only the starting point. The success of suburban strip revitalization will depend on whether the public's implementation strategies correlate with the agreed-upon plans and are funded. Public consistency and discipline in this regard will encourage the private sector to respond with appropriate actions and investments.



KMD ARCHITECTS

The following initiatives are a critical part of putting your money and regulations where your policy is:

- Integrate public facilities into the strip's redevelopment strategy. Public facilities should be sited in ways that help shape the desired form of the strip and enhance the synergy among private developments. The location of these facilities will leverage private investment on surrounding sites, create a focus for the community, provide a convenient destination where residents can accomplish multiple tasks, and help shape a more rational development pattern.
- Design zoning regulations that facilitate private developers in implementing the public's strategy. Zoning must be clearly linked to the public's implementation plans, including effective by-right development standards as well as transfer of development rights in mature strips. Not every developer has the wherewithal to go through a rezoning or a replanning effort.
- Create sophisticated development standards to accompany new zoning regulations. These standards should deal with landscaping, signage, architectural quality, pedestrian linkages, and other planning details so crucial to the overall health of the strip.
- Provide regulatory options that facilitate parceling and land assembly to accommodate recommended changes in land use configurations. This may involve changes that eliminate setbacks, provide streetfront and midblock development on multiple sites, or combine separately owned parcels to create new development options.
- Seamlessly integrate all public services and actions by the many public agencies that have jurisdiction within the strip.
- Create an aggressive nuisance abatement program to eliminate problems that inhibit achieving the kind of environment that facilitates the community's vision for the strip. Dilapidated or abandoned buildings, social problems, and incompatible land uses and activities are some of the more common problems affecting suburban strip development.
- Adopt zoning regulations that set a minimum parcel size (ten acres or more) along the strip so as to constrain curb cuts and encourage more coordinated development and fewer stand-alone stores.
- Prevent "deadening" uses, such as ministorage facilities, from dominating the strip.



DAVID WHITCOMB



DAVID WHITCOMB

Conclusion

The Urban Land Institute hopes that the ten principles for reinventing suburban strips presented in this report will act as a strategic guide for communities and developers around the country as they seek solutions to the problems of commercial sprawl, deterioration, obsolescence, and congested highways. Communities have an unprecedented opportunity to harness the tremendous market success of suburban strip development and translate this success into better performing community assets. The results will be more livable and sustainable communities, environments that are more adaptable to the emerging new face of retail, and property values that are enhanced as market demand matures.

ULI's ten principles are designed to be universally applied. However, it is anticipated that the specific courses of action to be taken by individual communities will vary widely within this strategic framework. Success will not be easy or fast—there are no quick fixes to what has been one of the most intractable development problems of the past 50 years. But the tasks are doable, the problems are solvable, and the strips are salvageable. The job must be started today, however, to correct the mistakes of the past, repair tattered and dysfunctional areas of the present, and provide a framework for future growth that incrementally reinvents suburban strips for the 21st century.



CHARLES LENOIR

Ten Principles for Reinventing America's Suburban Strips

Michael D. Beyard and Michael Pawlukiewicz

The demands of today's consumers, retail formats, and the economy are challenging the status quo in suburban strip development. Based on a study conducted by a team of planning and development experts, this booklet identifies the critical issues and challenges that strips face and provides an action plan to reinvent them to ensure their long-term competitive position. Developers and communities throughout the nation will find this guide an invaluable starting point for creating strategies that fully harness the tremendous market potential of suburban strips.

Ten smart growth principles include:

- Forming public/private partnerships to develop strategies and implement change.
- Anticipating an evolution in demographics and in the marketplace.

- Realistically assessing the market for a strip.
- Developing zoning strategies that improve the quality of strips by limiting the amount of retail-zoned land.
- Restructuring strips to create high-intensity development interspersed with stretches of low-intensity land use or open space.
- Crafting traffic patterns and parking to provide convenient access to retail stores and also serve through-traffic.
- Creating suburban "places" that attract people and encourage them to visit often.
- Diversifying the development of strips as development pressures increase and land values rise.
- Enhancing the physical design of strips to attract new and repeat customers.
- Understanding the importance of implementing and funding plans.

Related Titles from the Urban Land Institute

The Smart Growth Tool Kit
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