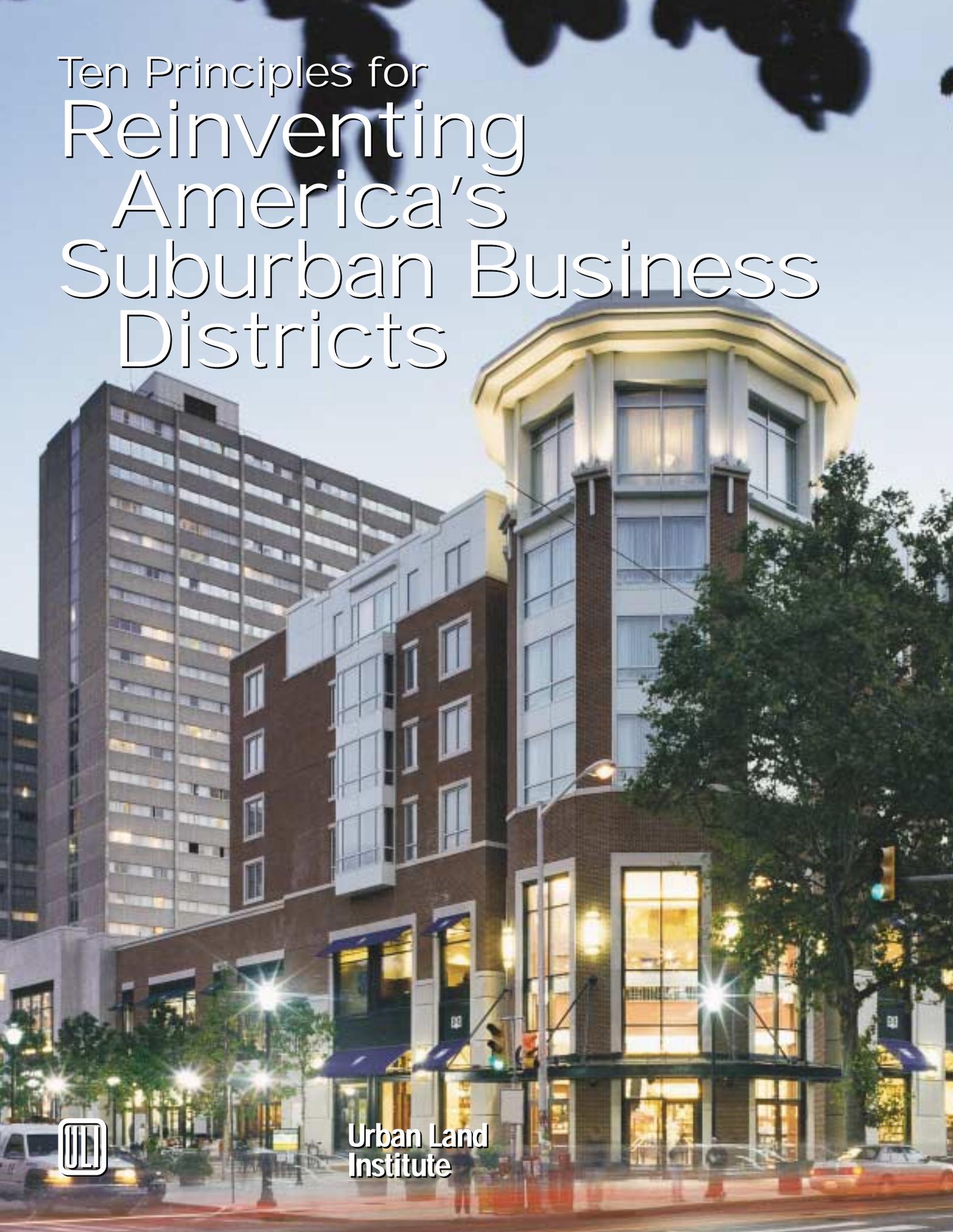


# Ten Principles for Reinventing America's Suburban Business Districts



Urban Land  
Institute

# Ten Principles for Reinventing America's Suburban Business Districts

Geoffrey Booth

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## About ULI—the Urban Land Institute

ULI—the Urban Land Institute is a non-profit 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 some 60 countries representing the entire spectrum of the land use and development disciplines.

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# Preface

America's new demographic profile is generally affluent and well traveled and therefore has developed a heightened appreciation of place. Tired of traffic congestion, many of today's households are looking to trade in their suburban lifestyle for one that gives them more choices and flexibility. They are looking for integrated live-work-shop places that are exciting, aesthetically pleasing, and pedestrian-friendly, and that offer numerous transportation options.

The key to successful real estate development and community building is to understand the psyche of the American people and move deftly to satisfy changing market demands and needs in the real estate places we create. Major demographic changes in America's population are creating new but as yet unsatisfied demands and opportunities. The real estate capital markets are looking for safe havens secured by strong market demand. Traffic congestion, fiscal constraints, and political opposition to significant road expansion programs are pointing to fundamental shifts in residential, office, and retail location and commuting patterns.

Americans traveling extensively overseas and with more disposable income than previous generations are demanding far more from their living, working, and shopping environments. New approaches to governance and city planning are fostering the emergence of fresh approaches to development opportunities while at the same time residential neighborhoods are closing their hearts and minds to suburban expansion in their own backyards. There now exists a heightened desire for community interaction—people expressing the need to be with other people in places close to where they live that are inviting, engaging, and safe.



These social and market trends offer the potential to transform America's more than 200 suburban business districts into more vibrant, pedestrian-friendly live-work-shop places, making them the emerging focus of smart growth. Currently, such reinvented places are in short supply, as most suburban business districts encompass a disparate group of isolated uses with little or no integration, a transportation system that is automobile-oriented and often hostile to pedestrians, and a near total absence of civic identity.

The transformation of suburban business districts demands a new form of community building that relies on both the vertical and horizontal integration of office, retail, residential, and community uses through the creation of places that Americans find so special and irresistible that they visit them again and again, invest in them, or choose them to reside in. These new trends can mark the turning point for smart growth in the suburbs, with the focus of the land use industry moving to the creation of pedestrian-friendly places that lift the spirit—special places that have been designed, built, and maintained to satisfy the full spectrum of human needs and aspirations, from the mundane to the inspirational.

In late June 2001, the Urban Land Institute convened a task force of 17 planning and development experts, under the chairmanship of ULI Trustee A. Eugene Kohn of Kohn Pedersen Fox in New York. Over two and one-half days, the task force was briefed on the research and analysis that were to form the basis of

### Attributes of Existing Business District Types

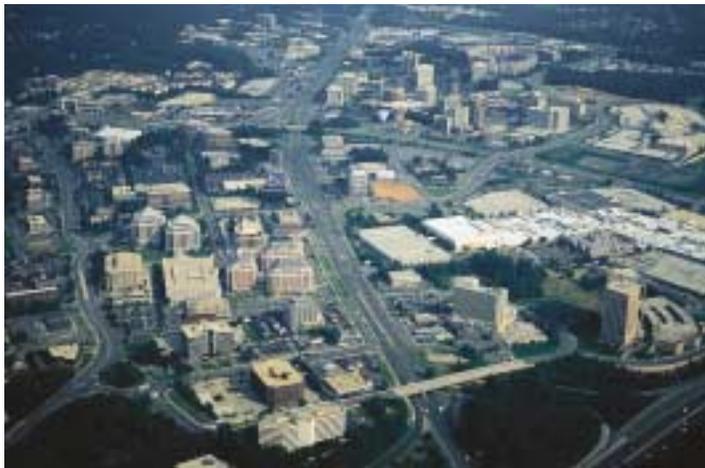
Attributes	Central Business District	Compact Suburban Business District	Fragmented Suburban Business District	Dispersed Suburban Business District
Development density	High	Medium	Low	Very low
Floor/area ratio	5.0 and above	2.5 and above	0.5 to 2.5	Up to 0.5
Building coverage	75 percent or more of lot area	50 percent or more of lot area	25 to 50 percent of lot area	Up to 25 percent of lot area
Lot area	Less than one acre	Less than one acre	Greater than one acre	Generally exceeds ten acres
Street layout	Grid	Grid	Superblock	Superblock
Land value	Very High	High	Medium	Low
Spatial separation between buildings	Very low	Low	High	Very high
Buildings dominate space?	Yes, buildings built to street alignment	Yes, buildings built to street alignment	No, buildings set back from road and separated by surface parking lots	No, buildings set back from road; often one to two stories in height in campus/park setting
Parking cost	Subject to charge	Subject to charge	Free	Free
Dominant parking type	Garages (restricted access)	Garages (restricted access)	Surface parking (restricted access)	Surface parking (unrestricted access)
Quality of transit service	Citywide, frequent	District-centric, less frequent	Local, infrequent	Local, very infrequent
Pedestrian orientation and quality of public domain	Very strong, encourages pedestrian activity	Strong, encourages pedestrian activity	Weak, often no pedestrian linkages; encourages patrons to drive to adjoining developments	Very weak, developments far apart and not within walking distance
Dependence on cars for access	Low	Moderate	High	Very high
Choice in mode of transit	Very good	Good	Poor	Very poor
Examples	Downtown, Washington, D.C.	Rosslyn, Arlington County, Virginia	Tysons Corner, Fairfax County, Virginia	College Boulevard-Overland Park, Kansas City, Kansas

Source: Geoffrey Booth, Urban Land Institute, 2001.



GEOFFREY BOOTH

**Compact suburban business districts typically consist of big buildings on small lots close together.**



© ALEX MCCLEAN LANDSLIDES BOSTON

**Fragmented suburban business districts include big buildings on large lots that separate the buildings from one another and therefore promote vehicle trips.**



DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES, INC.

**Dispersed suburban business districts generally consist of low-rise buildings on spacious lots scattered over a large area.**

ULI's new book, *Transforming Suburban Business Districts*, visited suburban business districts in the metropolitan Washington, D.C., area, and then devised ten principles to underpin strategic planning aimed at reinventing suburban business districts.

The task force found that a sense of place within business districts was determined by a range of factors including development density, spatial separation between buildings, pedestrian interconnections, street layout, and choice in mode of transit. It is these factors that have played a large part in the resurgence of central business districts in the 1990s and that will be the focus of smart growth and the reinvention of suburban business districts.

In reinventing suburban business districts, the task force considered it essential that its ten principles be applied during the strategic planning and development stage in order to maximize the place-making dividend—the intrinsic value that accrues to a community when districts possess a strong sense of place that in turn results in high levels of repeat visits, increasing rents, retail sales, leasing demand, and capital value. Such a dividend occurs when individual real estate projects are so well designed and interconnected that they work as one integrated place.

# Ten Principles

- 1 Understand Your Position in the Market
- 2 Build Community Support
- 3 Develop a Vision and a Plan
- 4 Stress Results over Regulation
- 5 Break Up the Superblocks and Optimize Connectivity
- 6 Embrace Mixed Use
- 7 Honor the Human Scale by Creating a Pedestrian-Friendly Place
- 8 Think Transit—Think Density
- 9 Create a Public/Private Partnership
- 10 Share and Manage Parking

# 1 Understand Your Position in the Market

The essential foundation of any strategic plan for reinventing a suburban business district is an understanding of the demographic and market trends that influence that district and its associated opportunities. It is vital to understand the suburban business district's position and potential in the market vis-à-vis other competing districts in the region. Too many competing districts within a region can lead to a surplus of retail space, lease restrictions, and low rents that frustrate rather than facilitate the transformation of suburban business districts. An oversupply of development entitlements thus can undermine the effective transformation of suburban business districts. To identify opportunities for investment and growth, both development interests and state and local governments must understand and evaluate trends in multifamily residential, retail, office, civic, cultural, and community development on the basis of local market circumstances.

The comparative shortage of workers in the next decade will prompt office tenants increasingly to locate in pedestrian-friendly suburban business districts that offer their employees advantages such as access to a variety of uses and services—for example, restaurants, retail services, and nightlife.

A clear, concise evaluation of potential public revenue sources and of the strength of the local tax base is essential. Based on fiscal assets and liabilities, the strategic plan can set forth priorities for both the private and public sectors





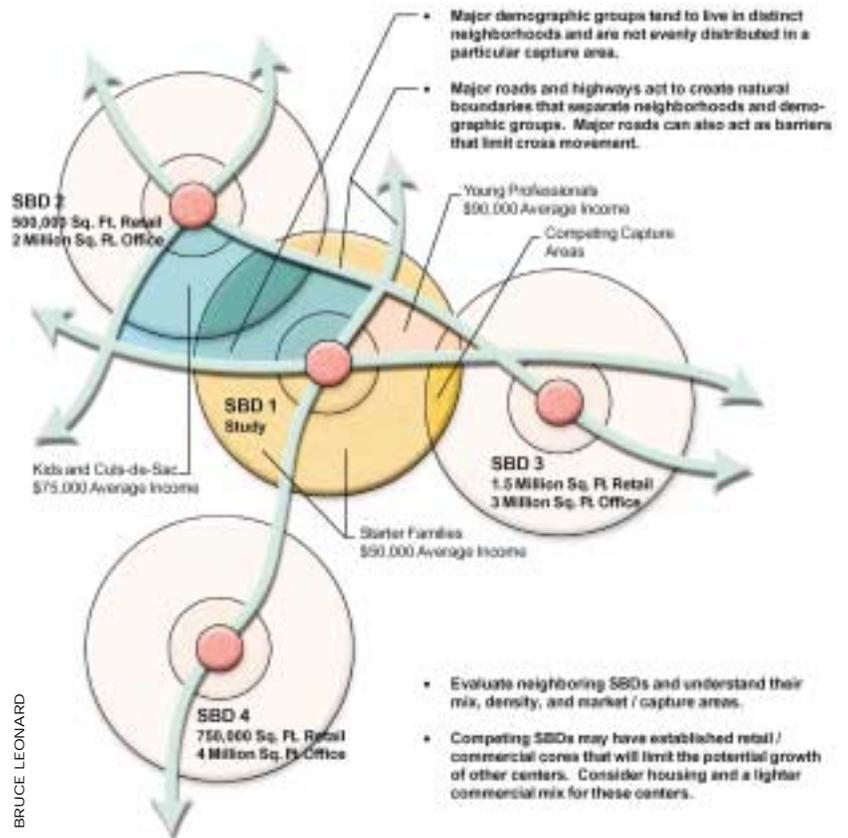
The Avenue at White Marsh near Baltimore is a lifestyle and entertainment center that uses cinemas, restaurants, lifestyle stores, and outdoor gathering spaces to promote community interaction and convey an upscale ambience in a middle-income market.

GEOFFREY BOOTH

that have a realistic prospect of being achieved. Such a lucid analysis of market potential also can act as the investment prospectus that attracts the attention and capital of investors. Suburban business districts that decisively transform their development configuration, density, and mix of uses to become pedestrian- and transit-friendly will reap dividends in the form of enhanced real estate value, community building, and tax base.

The precise strategy for each suburban business district will vary with local circumstances and needs. Understanding your position in the market involves:

- Identifying all competing suburban business districts in the region.
- Detailing the range of goods and services provided in each competing suburban business district.
- Identifying the market reach and attraction of your suburban business district.
- Concentrating on the market niche that your suburban business district can satisfy.
- Developing the investment prospectus that targets the form of development and range of uses that will enhance the attraction and performance of your suburban business district.



BRUCE LEONARD

Too many competing districts within a region can lead to a surplus of retail space, lease restrictions, and low rents that frustrate rather than facilitate the transformation of suburban business districts. An oversupply of development entitlements thus can undermine the effective transformation of suburban business districts.

# 2 Build Community Support

Community building involves the mobilization of public and private capital to create assets that engender pride and value in a community. It involves the activation and growth of community support through stakeholder consensus. The transformation of suburban business districts relies on a three-way partnership of the private sector, government, and the broader community. Community outreach must be ingrained in the process from the outset.

Many community-building projects have failed or wasted precious time and financial resources either in litigation or in gaining community support because essential communication channels were not established at the beginning. In

essence, such communication builds understanding and trust. The three-way partnership should be built on a firm foundation of shared goals and, at the very least, should include a fair and open process that allows all interested parties to be heard before decisions are made and implemented.

The use of the Internet, architectural renderings and virtual computer models, public meetings, community workshops, community advisory groups, town center stakeholder meetings, local press briefings, design charrettes, and/or public/private partnerships combine traditional with more innovative techniques to tap community advice, understanding, and support.

These instruments should facilitate an explicit process of decision making that enables the transformation of the suburban business district to proceed step by step to an outcome welcomed by a majority of the stakeholders. The process should have a limited time frame and a focus on outcomes. Caution should be exercised to ensure that the process is not subverted by parties with a vested interest in delaying the transformation of the suburban business district.

Citizen opposition to development, often termed NIMBYism (not in my back yard), will less likely be an issue in suburban business districts for the simple reason that districts generally lack a residential component. Nonetheless, community concern over traffic congestion and other issues makes it essential that the planning, regulatory, and marketing tools used for the transformation of suburban business districts are visual and accurately simulate the real-life impact that proposed development would have if such proposals are to gain citizen support.



CONTRA COSTA REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY

The Internet can be used to convey images of proposed design solutions and inform the community of dates and venues for future community meetings.

The communication process between developer and government needs to be held to a high standard, particularly as government agencies may need to play a financial role in support of a project. The process should identify explicitly who is responsible for making what decisions while also focusing on transparency and the building of trust and understanding among all stakeholders. Finally, local government support is absolutely crucial in that land use most frequently is a matter of local government control. Without an entitlement, there is no right to develop, no potential income stream, and therefore no bankable development project.



GEOFFREY BOOTH

Communities such as Old Town Alexandria have remained strong because the opportunity to interact has been nurtured by the physical form of the place and reinforced through the weekly market held in the town square.

Building community support involves:

- Creating a three-way partnership among the private sector, government, and the broader community.
- Establishing a process that allows each partner to be heard, thereby informing and reinforcing decisions that guide the reinvention of the suburban business district.
- Ensuring that all partners remain fully informed of progress and alert to any action by those with a vested interest in delaying the transformation of the suburban business district.
- Creating an understandable and timely process for delivering government entitlements and approvals to facilitate implementation of the process.

It is essential that planning, regulatory, and marketing tools are visual and accurately simulate the real-life impact that proposed development would have if it is to gain citizen support.



BRUCE LEONARD

# 3 Develop a Vision and a Plan

With a proper understanding of market potential and community and government needs and aspirations, a development vision of what is feasible can be shaped and a strategic plan can be devised that will enable its realization. While the vision needs to be tempered with realism, it should also be bold and innovative, drawing on the history, character, and strengths of the community. A successfully transformed suburban business district will become a community center that offers a range of live-work-shop opportunities seamlessly integrated into the surrounding community through strong pedestrian interconnections.

Using the existing street to accommodate transit can provide the suburban business district with freedom of choice in transportation mode and create a more pedestrian-friendly place. A typical suburban commercial street is shown (top) and its proposed new form (below) illustrating how dramatically suburban business districts can be reinvented.

The strategic plan that guides implementation of the vision must have community support and draw on expert professional advice. It must also be financially feasible and able to enhance tax revenues. Suburban business districts comprise numerous buildings, and the spaces between those buildings, if properly conceptualized and redesigned, can interconnect to create a sense of place. It is the sense of place that the community recognizes and rewards, thereby creating real estate value through increased rents, retail sales, and growing capital value—the place-making dividend.

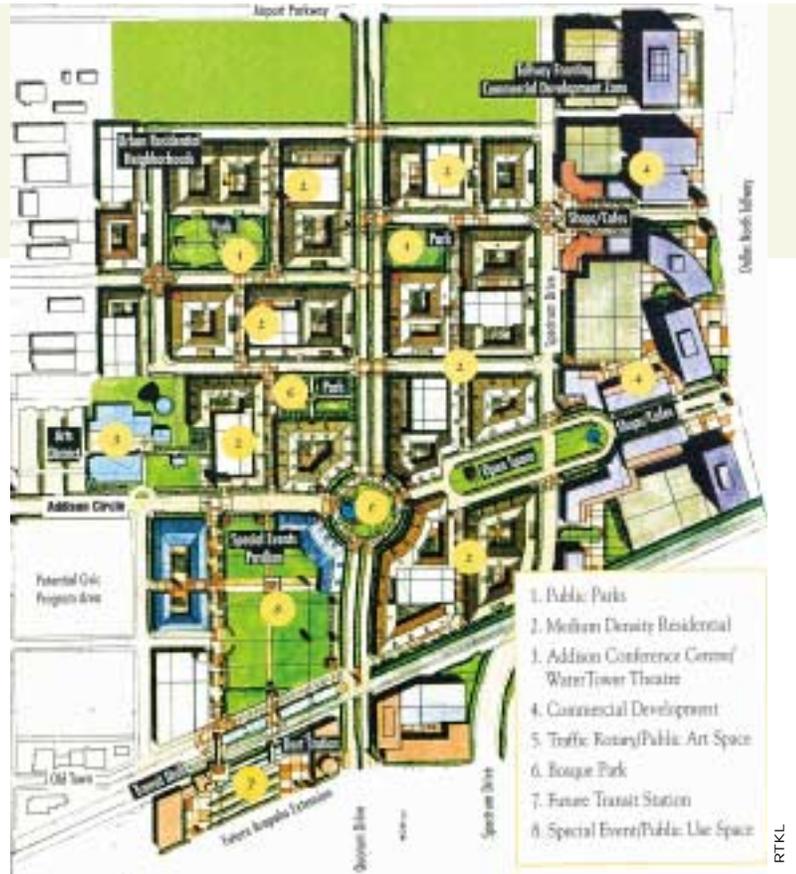
The strategic plan is the management tool through which the place-making dividend is achieved and sustained. Unless a strategic plan is implemented, it is not worth the paper it is written on—or the time and money invested in its preparation. A substantial investment in comprehensive development conceptualization will enhance the place-



making dividend and the realization of the community vision for the reinvented suburban business district.

Developing a vision and a plan involves:

- Establishing a vision of the reinvented suburban business district in terms of market potential, urban design, and a clear understanding of community needs and aspirations.
- Adopting a bold and innovative planning and development approach, tempered by realism that draws on the history, character, and strength of the community.
- Formulating a strategic plan with the assistance of experts drawing on the support and knowledge of the community.
- Monitoring to ensure that the strategic plan implements the vision.
- Encouraging all development agencies and individuals to commit to comprehensive development conceptualization and delivery in accordance with the intent and purpose of the strategic plan.



The Addison Circle plan (Addison, Texas) integrates mixed-use retail and residential development into the surrounding suburban business district.



The Courthouse Hill development in Arlington, Virginia, was designed to provide a transition from the high-rise residential development to the adjoining detached housing neighborhoods within the suburban business district.

LESSARD ARCHITECTURAL GROUP

# 4 Stress Results Over Regulations

Essential to the transformation of suburban business districts is a shift from the segregation of land uses through zoning to the creation of mixed-use and integrated development through place making. The regulatory tools applied during the 20th century to mandate and control place making have proven seriously inadequate and in most cases counterproductive in vesting suburban business districts with a sense of place.



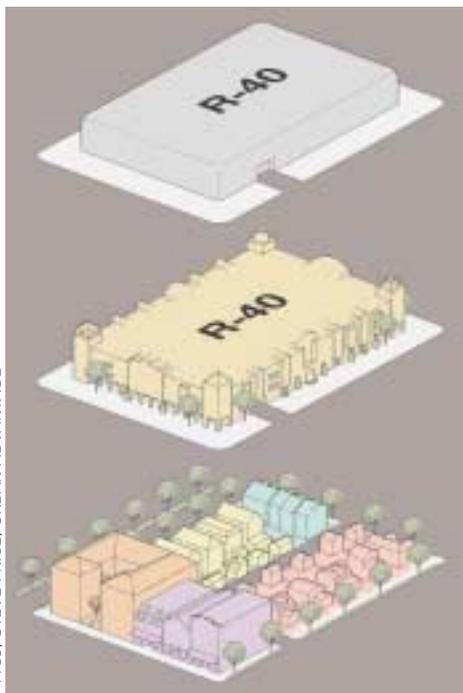
GEOFFREY BOOTH

Most metropolitan office space is located outside the CBD, like this isolated pod of office buildings.

In concentrating on legally prescriptive and exclusionary zoning codes, communities have come to rely on a flawed mechanism to convey the vision of the places they wish to create. Black-letter law and legal terminology do not evoke the full power of the visual sense, and they certainly do not trigger the companion senses of sound, smell, taste, or touch. Only humans possess the intrinsic skill to assess the quality of place by using all the

senses. The literal interpretation of the law, with its limited and limiting vocabulary and legal style, fails to evoke a sense of place or capture the imagination in the way good writing or a film can.

Typological zoning codes seek not just to control land use entitlement but also to dictate building type and location. This is a prescriptive but inflexible form of zoning that may be difficult to change as community needs and aspirations change.



©1988. STEVE PRICE. URBAN ADVANTAGE

The advent of new planning instruments based on visioning processes, however, aid the regulatory process by making it possible “virtually” to create places that we can experience before we approve and construct them. With visioning processes, we can use our senses to assess the quality of a proposed project and its contribution to place making. Using this approach, the strategic plan, in digital form, can use real-time interactive design models synchronized with sound to evoke a three-dimensional sense of place.

Through a thorough process of consultation and the creation of a development vision, the land use entitlement process for suburban business districts could shift from inflexible zoning codes to strategic plans that allow greater flexibility and encourage the district and its component developments to be progressively modified to meet ever-changing community needs and aspirations. As Eugene Kohn said during deliberations of the ULI task force,

“Land use controls should allow projects to be modified to meet changing community needs without necessarily triggering a new entitlement process.” The strategic plan is not one that works toward a final state but rather one that demands ongoing management and refinement. A strategic plan that lacks flexibility to change and evolve is inherently flawed.

Stressing results over regulations involves:

- Recognizing that the zoning system needs to be reformed so that zoning no longer focuses on the separation of uses but rather on the creation of places that people will find so special that they will visit them repeatedly, invest in them, and choose them as residences.
- Ensuring that strategic plans and regulatory instruments draw increasingly on all the senses to evoke the special sense of place that is desired.
- Refining the new planning instruments based on “community visioning” so that plans and development projects can be presented in a digital form whereby they virtually can be experienced before they are approved and constructed.
- Developing a new breed of land use and place-making codes that are flexible and responsive to changing community needs, allowing the timely approval and modification of development entitlements that comply with the strategic plan’s purpose and intent.

**These new parking facilities and the new pedestrian linkages in Uptown Houston work together to reduce traffic congestion by decreasing the need to drive from one suburban business district establishment to another. They also optimize retail sales by creating pedestrian linkages that connect and expose patrons to retail establishments.**



ARLINGTON COUNTY MAPPING CENTER AND DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**The visualization of place through real-time, near-motion-picture-quality interactive computer modeling provides the platform to move beyond zoning to place making.**



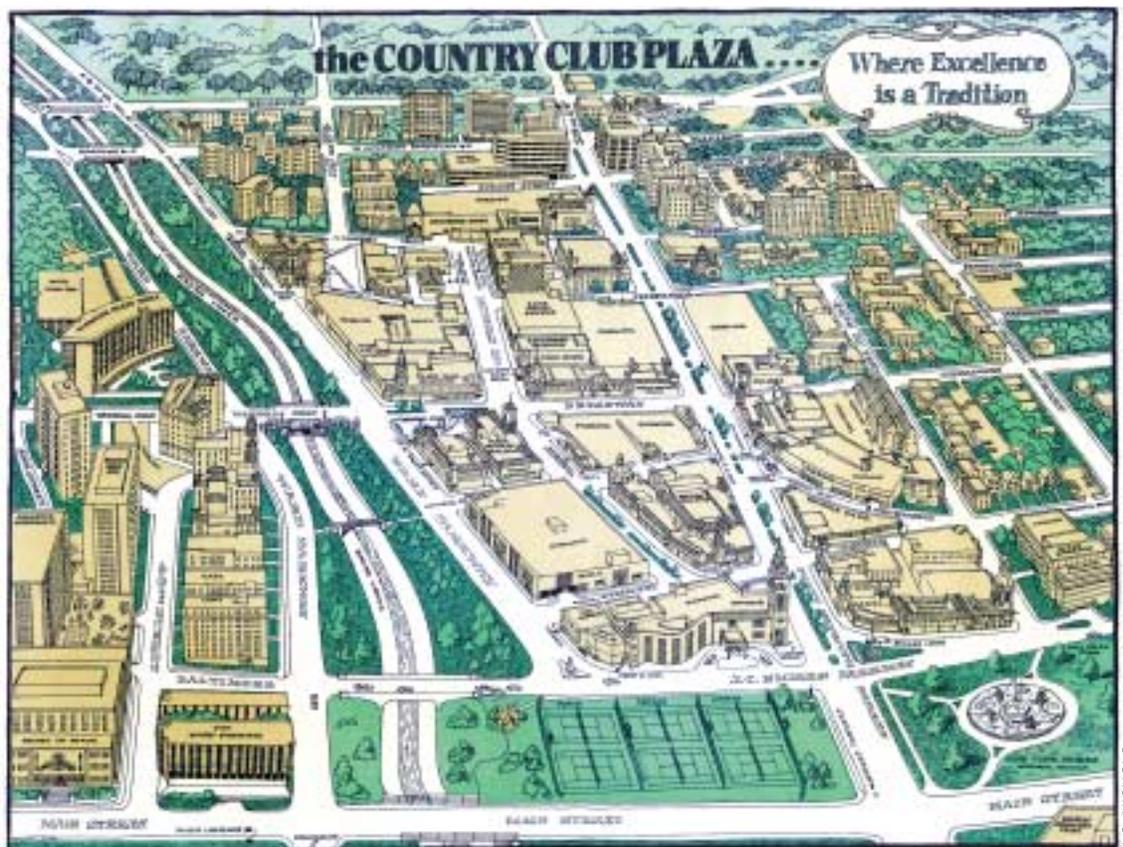
BARTON, SMITH, VINSON & ELLIS

# 5 Break Up the Superblocks and Optimize Connectivity

**T**ransforming a suburban business district from a collection of geographically close but segregated real estate projects into integrated places allows customers and clients to patronize a variety of establishments more easily. No longer forced into their cars to move from one establishment to another, patrons and clients can park their cars once for the duration of the stay, thereby reducing the amount of space that otherwise would be needed for on-site parking at each establishment.

At the same time, the reduced number of vehicle trips within the suburban business district translates into lower levels of congestion and allows the width and capacity of internal roads to be reduced while the district itself gains stature and takes shape as a real place. Integrating uses requires pedestrian-friendly, fine-grid development that engages and never intimidates the pedestrian; it offers interconnectivity and easy walking distance from one use to another.

The value of real estate derives from the intensity and interconnection of its uses. The essence of community is human connection and a sense of belonging to an identifiable place and an active public realm. Initially, both tenants and



The inherent strength of Country Club Plaza in Kansas City, Missouri, is its mix of retail, entertainment, residential, and office uses, all of which are provided within a compact and aesthetically pleasing pedestrian- and transit-friendly environment.

investors found standalone real estate projects in suburban business districts simple to understand and easy to access. As discrete packages, investment markets found them simple to finance and digest. Further, with the growing number of comparable developments, appraisers could readily determine a project's capital value. Increasingly, standalone projects reflect a compartmentalization of community life.

Interconnectivity can be improved through better signage and way-finding to encourage intradistrict movement, improved road layouts, and circulation patterns; the provision of shuttle bus service; and the strategic location of parking areas and sidewalk connections. The integration of development, the provision and management of shared parking, the creation of mixed uses along pedestrian linkages, and the increase in density around transit stations can be effective tools in breaking the cycle of traffic congestion while creating more pedestrian- and community-friendly living environments.



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**Main streets can provide a greater variety of sensory experiences with the use of built and natural forms, sculptures, and color in a configuration that invites shoppers to explore and enjoy.**

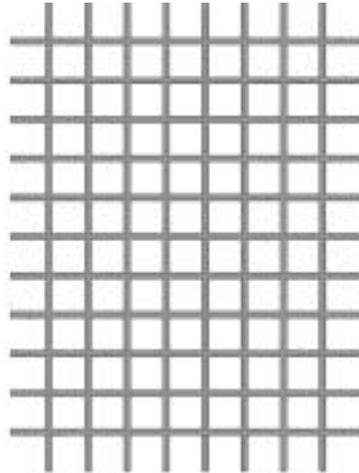


GEOFFREY BOOTH

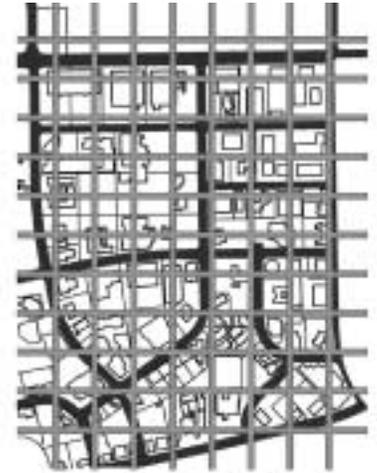
**Office locations that offer transportation options and more than a 9:00-to-5:00 range of activities promote travel at other than peak hours.**



The supergrid plat in the Irvine Business Complex is typical of many suburban business districts throughout America.



The traditional grid plat of streets and blocks on a 400-foot centerline to centerline.



Superblocks can cover an area of up to 12 grid blocks, making them difficult for pedestrians to navigate, thereby promoting the use of vehicles leading to traffic congestion.

SASAKI ASSOCIATES

Mixed-use development can reduce trip generation, spread the peak-hour flows on arterial roads, make transit provision more cost-effective, and allow more people the option of living closer to their place of employment.



GEOFFREY BOOTH

Breaking up superblocks and optimizing connectivity involve strong political leadership and, often, the catalytic investment of public funds in:

- Breaking up superblock plats and reorienting roads and vehicle circulation patterns.
- Improving pedestrian linkages.
- Providing or enhancing public open space.
- Establishing community uses.
- Developing structured parking.
- Creating public/private partnerships.
- Establishing special taxing district and tax-increment financing mechanisms.
- Providing public transit before there is the demand to support it.



GEOFFREY BOOTH

Distinctive, informal gathering places within the public realm are sorely lacking in most suburban business districts.

These two plans, drawn at the same scale, show how a compact business district can facilitate pedestrian circulation and promote a more transit-friendly environment.



Compact suburban business district.



Fragmented suburban business district.

MONTGOMERY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND PLANNING

# 6 Embrace Mixed Uses

**M**ixed uses create critical mass and a sense of place by affording the community a wider range of goods, services, and experiences at one location, thereby increasing connectivity and choice and reducing trip generation rates. The diversification of use within projects hedges a district's income stream and makes for proper and balanced risk management of property investments.

Not surprisingly, after a half-century of segregated uses, consumers are growing more discerning about the environments in which they want to live. By providing a range of choices, mixed uses can play a critical role in transforming suburban business districts. Most suburban business districts would benefit from the addition of multifamily housing, increased development densities to support transit, and the mixed-use development of voids and open parking lots to create more pedestrian-friendly environments.

To establish and reinforce a sense of community in a suburban business district requires a critical mass of mixed uses—a rule of thumb suggests a minimum of 200,000 square feet of retail uses and 2,000 dwelling units within a ten-minute walk of each other. Office uses feed retail operations by supplying customers for stores and restaurants both during the day and after work. Retail uses within walking distance of employment or residences—restaurants, bookstores, clothing stores, gift shops, and coffee bars—reinforce amenities that allow and encourage employees and residents to go out to lunch or run errands without relying on their cars. The addition of theaters, museums, art galleries, libraries, post

Multifamily residential units, when integrated into the fabric of the suburban business district, provide a constant customer base for shops, restaurants, entertainment venues, and local businesses.



offices, and town halls that are properly integrated into suburban business districts attracts significant pedestrian traffic, which supports a range of other uses.



ELKUS/MANFREDI, ESTO PHOTOGRAPHICS, INC

Embracing mixed use involves:

- Removing planning and regulatory barriers in the form of land use controls and onerous parking requirements that prohibit mixed-use development.
- Encouraging government and community incentive and support for mixed-use development by providing parking garages, public domain improvements, streetscaping, and transportation choices.
- Designing the reinvented suburban business district so that pedestrian paths offer opportunities and choices in location of retail, education, community, and residential land uses.
- Clustering and interconnecting activities that benefit from collocation and mixed use, such as office, retail, residential, and transit-oriented uses.
- Providing community infrastructure and facilities within reinvented suburban business districts rather than on standalone sites in greenfield locations accessed only by automobile.

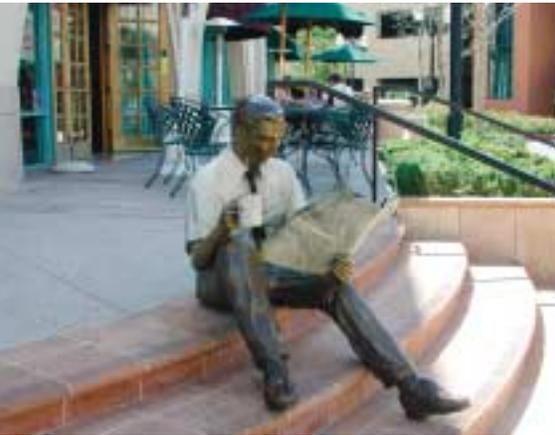
Mixed-use town center developments can provide office workers with a complete live-work-shop environment.

When it relocated to Valencia Town Center, Princess Cruises gave its labor force amenities such as housing choices, restaurants, shops, entertainment venues, and a health club—all within walking distance of its office.



GEOFFREY BOOTH

# Honor the Human Scale by Creating a Pedestrian-Friendly Place



GEOFFREY BOOTH

The human factor in sculptures enhances community appreciation of art and creates a sense of place.

High-quality, well-located community parks are vital place-making components of suburban business districts.



GEOFFREY BOOTH

Establishing a live-work-shop environment with a sense of place is a community need as well as an aspiration. Place making is the essence of real estate development. As people choose one place over another, the place of choice attracts a higher value and sells at a premium. Places that are desirable appeal to all the senses—sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. They are a rich mix of local activities, aesthetic design, quality, and price. Successful place making is about meeting demand from the local community. It is not a formulaic real estate product or the latest fad. Therefore, developers are motivated to exercise a high level of conceptualization and market matching in their place-making activities.

Besides allowing people to perform essential functions such as holding jobs and shopping, places should be enjoyable, entertaining, and educational. Success in place making lies in configuring spaces and structures and the interconnections between and among them in a way that facilitates and encourages human activity and interaction—an environment that people want to be a part of because it has been designed, built, and maintained with the goal of satisfying the full spectrum of human needs and aspirations from the mundane to the inspirational. A successful place appeals to the senses, engaging visitors and inhabitants alike in a voyage of discovery of enticing sights, sounds, and scents.

Honoring the human scale by creating a pedestrian-friendly place involves a strong focus on improving the public domain and the design and activity within the streetscape and public places specifically as related to:

- Controlling the length and width of the public domain or street.
- Slowing the speed and reducing the number of vehicle movements.
- Enhancing lighting, finishes, and street furniture.
- Expanding the range of available activities.
- Matching the scale of development to human comfort and a sense of belonging.
- Ensuring that users can “feel at home” and navigate easily within the area.



Shopping Streets

Strip Mall

The place-making dividend is maximized with the shopping street configuration, but less so with the strip mall facing the parking area configuration.



BRUCE LEONARD

- Ensuring a continuity of pedestrian-friendly, street-level activities.
- Incorporating art, architecture, and community icons.
- Providing on-street parking and ease of access to off-street parking garages.
- Creating pedestrian linkages lined with interesting and enticing activities.
- Providing transportation choices.
- Maintaining clean, safe, and diversified streets where people of all ages and races, visitors and residents, come together to celebrate community life.
- Providing public parks and community gathering places that are alive with civic and cultural events.
- Stimulating interest and community life through activity along the street.



Bollards, trees, custom-designed pole lighting, and distinctive paving add to the mix of textures, and carts and kiosks help provide the diversity that creates place, as shown in this photograph of the Promenade at Westlake in California.

# 8

## Think Transit—Think Density

With increasing public awareness of the cost of traffic congestion, suburban business districts that offer a choice of transportation options and more than a 9:00-to-5:00 range of activities—and thus promote travel at other than peak hours—will enjoy a competitive advantage. Leasing agents throughout the United States report that clients view access to mass transportation and rich cultural activities as the two pluses of intown property that are not found in outlying counties. Culture and transportation add value because they attract a young workforce, which employers seek.



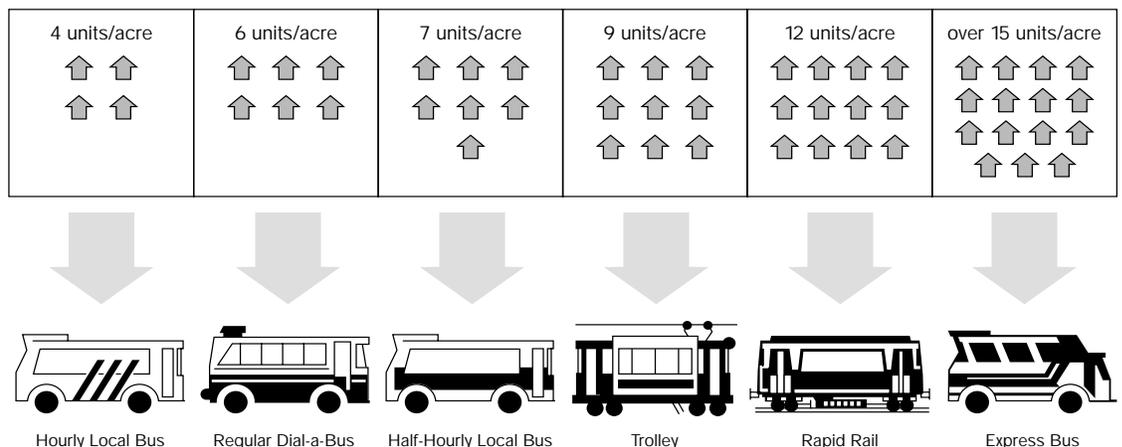
GEOFFREY BOOTH

With each successive wave of suburban business district development, density has decreased and buildings have become more dispersed.

Independent research of office market performance over the past 15 years has found that a significant percentage of office tenants will pay a rental premium for transit-linked offices—a factor that will become increasingly important as employers are forced to compete for a reduced labor supply that demands more transportation choices. With increased development density, especially around transit stations, a suburban business district can become more compact; space

between buildings will be reduced, resulting in better integration and pedestrian interconnections.

Increased density supports the cost-effective provision of a wider range of use and transportation systems. However, a commitment to development density carries with it a responsibility for excellence in place making that goes well beyond the architecture of individual buildings, contributing to the fabric, connectivity, and attraction of the place's total components. Careful attention must be paid in design to the eradication of the “weakest links” as they will only serve to undermine community acceptance of increased development density. It is the critical mass of activity that comes with increased development density that provides



Higher densities make transit more cost- and energy-efficient. Minimum densities are shown in this diagram, but average densities will vary with suburban business district size and distances.

Source: Boris S. Pushkarev and Jeffrey M. Zupan, *Public Transportation and Land Policy* (Ontario, Canada: Indiana University Press/Bloomington and London, 1977).

residents with choices, reduces congestion, secures property values, and provides a sustainable tax base.

With available options such as walking, bicycling, and transit use, vehicle trips and required parking areas are reduced along with the level of traffic congestion. Multifamily housing integrated into the suburban business district further promotes transportation choices. More balanced government transportation spending should enhance the accessibility of existing community and real estate assets rather than providing, as it has to date, the means to abandon existing congested locations for greener pastures at the urban fringe and beyond. Those suburban business districts that fail to balance automobile access with improved pedestrian and transit access will put their future patronage, attractiveness, and capital value at risk.

Thinking density and transit involves:

- Meeting the community's emerging needs to provide employment locations with a range of ancillary activities and services in addition to office space.
- Increasing development density and building interconnections and pedestrian linkages to enable the cost-effective provision of a wide range of uses and transportation systems.
- Safeguarding the future prosperity of the reinvented suburban district by protecting it from traffic congestion and providing it with an enhanced level of transportation choice and accessibility.



GEOFFREY BOOTH

Higher-density development and pedestrian-friendly streetscapes in compact suburban business districts provide a greater choice of activities and a good reason to walk.



GEOFFREY BOOTH

Transit can be a critical tool for transforming suburban business districts.



BRUCE LEONARD

The utilization of a fine grid layout that is pedestrian-friendly can provide for convenient locations for bus transit routes and stops.

# Create a Public/Private Partnership



The new CityPlace in West Palm Beach, Florida, is the result of a \$500 million public/private partnership investment that demonstrates what is possible in transforming an underperforming business district into an exciting live-work-shop place.

Business improvement districts can use a special tax levy on landowners to provide for services such as maintenance, sanitation, security, promotions, and special events, and in some cases, for capital improvements, such as the signage shown in this photograph, as well as street furniture, special lighting, and streetscaping.

In most cases, the successful transformation of a suburban business district depends on the ability of the private and public sectors to cooperate under a partnership arrangement that engenders community support, minimizes project risk, and delivers place-making dividends to all stakeholders. The place-making dividend accrues to both the developer and the community. Therefore, it is only fair that both should invest in its creation by way of a partnership that leverages the investments of both.

Business improvement districts (BID) or redevelopment agencies can establish the public/private management entities that can use tax-increment financing (TIF) or special tax levies to fund capital and recurrent expenditures in the catalytic transformation of a suburban business district. Government agencies can locate educational facilities, hospitals, libraries, government employees, community centers, and parking garages in suburban business districts to reinforce their drawing power and sense of place.

A suburban business district can use TIF financing to break up the superblock plat and provide better pedestrian interconnectivity within the suburban business district. This can be pivotal to the transformation process and is unlikely to

occur without a public/private partnership. The realization of the strategic plan cannot rely solely on developer levies or a zoning and entitlement process that often works against the transformation process. To be most effective, the strategic plan for reinventing the suburban business district must become the vehicle for coordinating the policies, programs, and fiscal priorities of each level of government so as to transform suburban business districts into new live-work-shop places.



THE RELATED COMPANIES

GEOFFREY BOOTH

## Public Financing Tools

- Tax-increment financing.
- Tax abatements.
- Parking bonds.
- Land leases.
- Low-income housing tax credits.
- Transit-oriented development funding—Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) funds.
- Loans and grants.

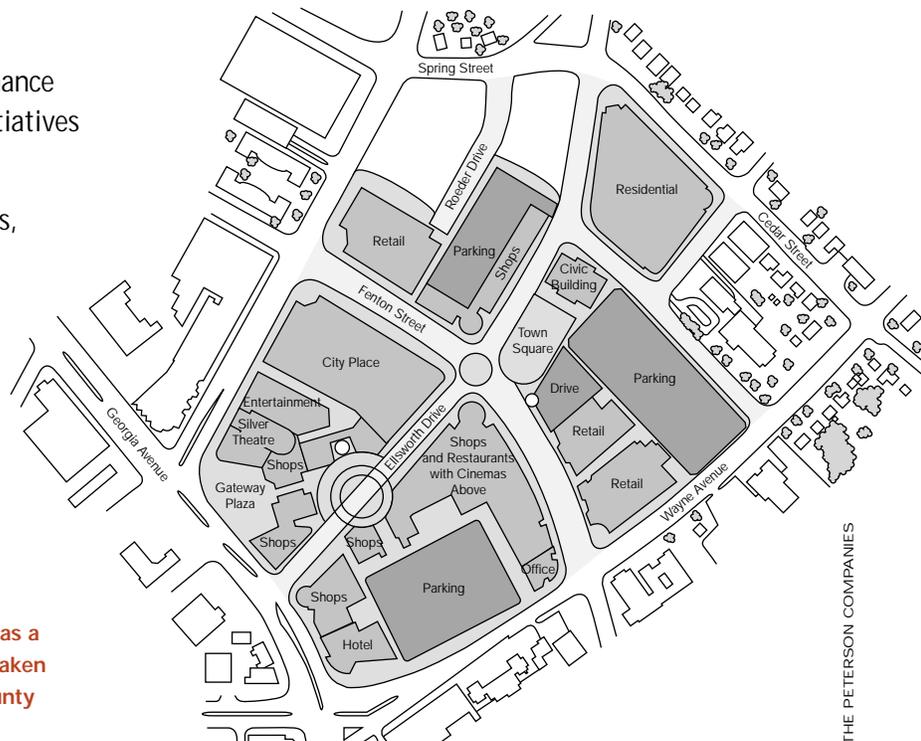


NEWHALL LAND AND FARMING COMPANY

The business improvement district program can market suburban business districts to the community—using festivals, events, sales promotions, maps and newsletters, image enhancement and advertising campaigns, and directional signage—to create and reinforce a subliminal pattern of repeat visitation.

Creating a public/private partnership involves:

- Ensuring that the investment in the partnership delivers a fair and just dividend to each party.
- Using business improvement districts, tax-increment financing, and an appropriate selection of public financing tools to leverage private sector capital committed to the reinvention of the suburban business district.
- Establishing a government commitment to enhance pedestrian interconnections and place-making initiatives within the suburban business district.
- Coordinating policies, programs, fiscal priorities, and service location activities of each level of government to harness all public resources in the implementation of the strategic plan.



THE PETERSON COMPANIES

The successful redevelopment of Silver Spring, Maryland, as a transit-oriented suburban business district is being undertaken by a public/private partnership between Montgomery County and private developers.

# 10 Share and Manage Parking

Each development that stands alone must provide its own on-site parking. Devoting large portions of a site to surface parking lots encourages patrons to rely on the automobile and, at the same time, prevents integrated development and ensures that density will be so low as to preclude the provision of cost-effective transit. The predominant driver of development form and configuration becomes parking. It is therefore vital in the transformation of suburban business districts that the place—not the parking facility—becomes the destination.



Geoffrey Booth

Surface parking consumes vast acreage, creates an unattractive pedestrian environment, and increases the space between buildings.

In one typical U.S. city, for every car, five parking spaces currently are provided, which means that accommodating a projected 1 million increase in population over the next 20 years will require an additional 685,000 parking spaces, or 37 square miles of surface area. Under these circumstances, it becomes virtually impossible to go from one building to another without driving.

One solution is to increase the number of parking structures and improve parking design and placement, which can reduce the land area devoted to parking and allow buildings to be closer and more integrated with each other. Structured parking facilities generally become cost-effective when the price of land for the development reaches \$30 per square foot; below this land cost, surface parking often is more cost-effective. Therefore, public involvement in garage construction may be required to achieve the place-making dividend.

The strategic location, design, and programming of parking structures also can create or enhance attractive, well-traveled pedestrian linkages that can reduce the need for cars and thus for parking spaces. Moreover, the use of ground-level space in parking structures for retail and services can create a more attractive streetscape and pedestrian environment, encouraging more pedestrian trips. On-street parking can provide attractive and effective parking arrangements in retail areas.

Another solution is to allow and plan for shared parking within mixed-use areas. When properly managed, shared parking can reduce the maximum number of parking spaces required, as different users can park in the same space for different purposes at different times of the day and week, thus reducing the effects of peak demand from a single land use. A mixed-use environment also can decrease the need for parking by increasing pedestrian trips.

For example, a restaurant/delicatessen within walking distance of office workers at lunchtime will require fewer parking spaces than a restaurant that can be



Using the ground floor of a parking garage to accommodate restaurants and shops can provide additional cash flow as well as an active streetfront in suburban business districts, as shown in this photograph of Walnut Creek, California.

GEOFFREY BOOTH

reached only by car. Offices located within easy walking distance of a hotel may require fewer parking spaces for visitors than other offices; business guests staying at the hotel will be able to walk to offices. Finally, the strategic location of shared-parking facilities can create well-traveled pedestrian linkages that can be lined with shops and cultural and civic activities.

Parking involves an opportunity cost, as it takes up potentially developable land. Even so, free or low-cost parking likely will remain a feature of suburban business districts. For this reason, local government funding or underwriting often will be required to cover the difference in construction costs between surface parking lots and parking garages. Aside from charging nominal parking fees to help pay costs, costs also can be defrayed by renting out the ground floor of the parking garage to restaurants and shops. First-floor retail

In Mizner Park, residential buildings face the parking structures, which enhances the streetscape as well as the return on the project.



GEOFFREY BOOTH



The town or village center, if it is pedestrian- and transit-friendly, promotes community use and encourages the establishment around it of mixed uses that add diversity and interest to the suburban business district. It also provides the focal point for the provision of cost-effective transit.

than is required for the economic viability of the development and to require the incorporation of shared-parking provisions into strategic plans in place of mandatory zoning and parking codes. Where possible, tenants should be charged at least a nominal rent so that parking is recognized as a service with an attendant cost. The rental fee becomes the basis for the parking structures' treatment and valuation as a real estate asset that can then be leveraged.

Sharing and managing parking involves:

- Locating and constructing parking garages and lots that encourage ground-level activity and make pedestrian linkages attractive.
- Using parking facilities for shared parking, serving multiple uses rather than a single use.
- Providing leasable space along the frontage or on the ground floor of parking garages to generate cash flow and offset the capital cost of construction.
- Charging a nominal rental or parking charge where possible in suburban business districts.
- Exploring the option of requiring that parking for new development within the suburban business district is purchased at cost from the government authority's stock of parking garage spaces and not provided as surface parking within the development site.

uses lining structured parking facilities create an active streetfront, as in Walnut Creek, California. In Mizner Park in Boca Raton, Florida, the parking structure is separated from the street by a row of multifamily apartments.

One innovative parking policy and financial solution has involved the city developing the parking structures for its business district and then, as part of the entitlement process, requiring all future developments to buy a share of the structures rather than provide parking on their own sites. It is essential to provide no more parking

# Carpe Diem—Seize the Day

If they are to realize their potential, suburban business districts must be reinvented as more functional, more diverse, more interconnected, and more pedestrian-friendly places than they are today. They likely will be linked by improved transit service and will emphasize good pedestrian linkages and place-making standards beyond the realm of traditional zoning provisions. Public agencies most likely will be called upon to become full financial partners in the reinvention of suburban business districts.

At the same time, far from being abandoned as a mode of transportation, the automobile should be put in proper perspective and become a choice in a balanced offering of transportation options. Growing opposition to government spending on the expansion of infrastructure, and the proliferation of smart growth programs, will curtail severely the practice of abandoning established areas for new greenfield development on the exurban fringe. Indeed, employers faced with a tight labor market will compete for the best employees by touting the quality of life that distinguishes the areas in and around their place of employment.

Reinventing suburban business districts effectively can only happen when a strong partnership among the community and the public and private sectors is developed, focusing on the implementation of a new vision to achieve a sense of place.

By meeting the changing needs and aspirations of Americans, the reinvented suburban business district will reap the rich reward of the place-making dividend—for the community (as a place that the community owns and loves), for the government (as a place that generates tax streams), and for the private sector (as a place that attracts strong visitation and sales, rental income growth, and increased capital values). The result will be the very best that smart growth has to offer. It can be achieved through the timely, resolute, and intelligent application of ULI's ten principles for reinventing suburban business districts.

DOVER, KOHL & PARTNERS

In the proposed Kendall development in Miami, Dade County, Florida, the banks of Snapper Creek are to be transformed through the use of infill development. The photographs of the existing development (below) and the proposed redevelopment (bottom) capture the extent of the planned transformation.



# Ten Principles for Reinventing America's Suburban Business Districts

*Geoffrey Booth, Bruce Leonard, and Michael Pawlukiewicz*

Fresh ideas and development opportunities are emerging in response to trends in demographics, traffic congestion, fiscal constraints, and opposition to suburban development. Based on a study conducted by a team of planning and development experts, this booklet describes how reinventing suburban business districts can deal with these trends and issues and can address the changing needs of the community. Both the public sector and the private sector will find it an invaluable guide in creating a strategic plan for transforming suburban business districts into attractive, pedestrian-friendly places where people can live, work, and shop.

Ten place-making principles include:

- Realistically assessing the market position and potential for a suburban business district.
- Building community support by developing consensus among citizens, government, and the private sector.
- Developing a strategic plan that is supported by the community and that draws on professional expertise.
- Rethinking existing zoning regulations to allow mixed uses that can be modified over time as the needs of the community evolve.
- Creating interconnected, pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use districts from existing isolated superblocks.

- Embracing mixed uses that offer the community a wider range of goods, services, and experiences in one location.
- Creating pedestrian-friendly places that encourage interaction.
- Offering a choice of transportation modes, such as pedestrian, transit, bicycle, and automobile options.
- Forming public/private partnerships to minimize risk, develop strategies, and implement change.
- Sharing and managing parking to reduce the number of spaces required and consolidating more uses within buildings to encourage pedestrians.

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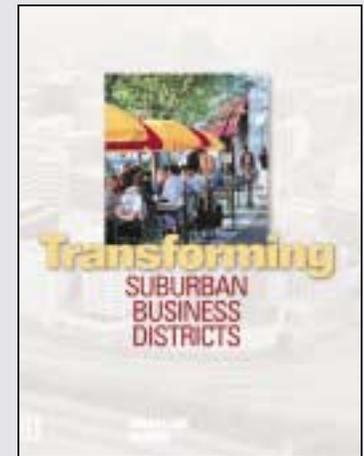
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