

ZONING PRACTICE

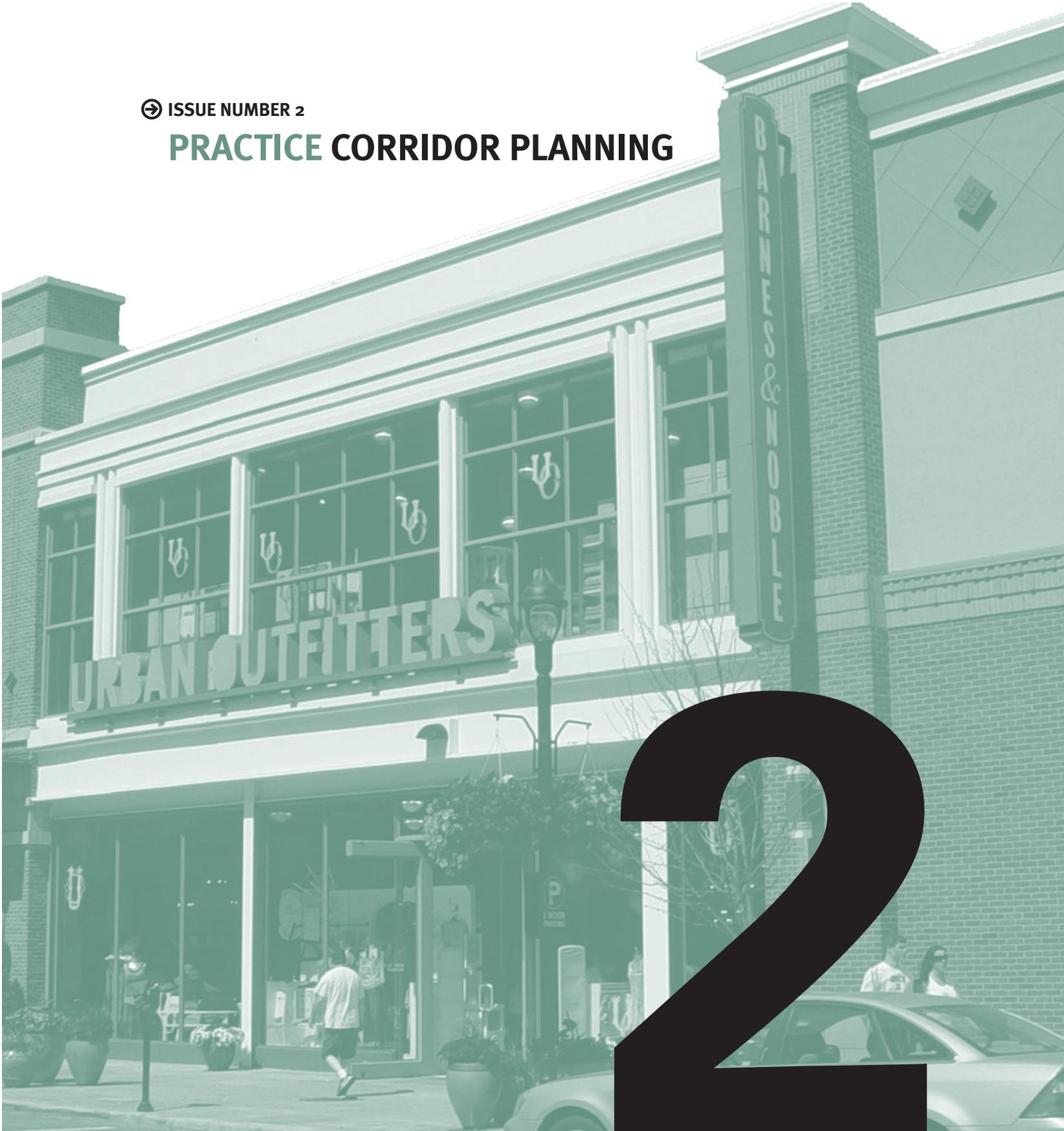
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PRACTICE CORRIDOR PLANNING



Rethinking Corridors

By David Dixon

Over the last half-century, arterial corridors that connected 19th-century villages and served as the Main Streets of early 20th-century downtowns and neighborhoods evolved into the primary engines—and icons—of sprawl.

Zoning and other regulatory tools institutionalized a continuous pattern of low-density, auto-oriented strip development that reflected both the realities of American real estate markets and the planning goals of many American communities from the end of World War II until recently.

Over the past decade, rapid demographic changes and related shifts in real estate economics and community values set the stage for transforming many arterial corridors into “strings of pearls”—pedestrian-oriented, mixed use, higher density, walkable redevelopment connected by stretches of auto-oriented strip development. These nodes offer significant quality-of-life and economic opportunity benefits for host communities—reviving urban main streets and suburban town centers.

These strings of pearls represent transformational, not incremental change. Early on, community-based planning is essential to build the public understanding and political support required to implement higher density redevelopment that may be largely unfamiliar—and initially threatening—to the surrounding community. This planning forms the foundation for a new generation of regulatory tools that focus on quality of place, innovative parking solutions, sustainable development, public/private partnerships, regional transportation planning, and similar characteristics associated with managing development of a district rather than a series of one-off developments.

SETTING THE STAGE

Many corridors have long, proud histories, closely intertwined with the early development of communities along their path. Centuries of development, driven by economic change, have shaped what often began as Native American trails at every stage of their development.

Suburbanization: 1950–1990

By the 1950s access to a car was nearly universal. The population of America’s suburbs increased by almost half between 1950 and 1956, while its cities stopped growing. By 1970, more Americans lived in suburbs than cities or rural settlements. Arterial corridors proved to be the natural channels along which suburban development spread—followed quickly by stores and jobs. Most suburban communities had very little capacity to manage this rapid growth; strip development satisfied market demand and symbolized success.

New Challenges: 1990–2000

Big boxes, power centers, and other new forms of retail began to out-compete older strip retail during the 1990s. These “category killers” competed across far larger distances and drained business from mul-

ti-ple corridors. By the mid-1990s America had a significant oversupply of auto-oriented retail—and roughly twice as much retail space per capita as other developed nations. Arterial corridors also suffered from overbuilt suburban office markets. As environmental and financial obstacles limited road building, growing traffic translated into dramatic increases in hours lost to congestion. In the slow-growth Boston region, hours lost increased 50 percent during the 1990s, 10 times the population growth. Congestion further depressed investment interest, and weaker strip retail centers became known as “grayfields.”

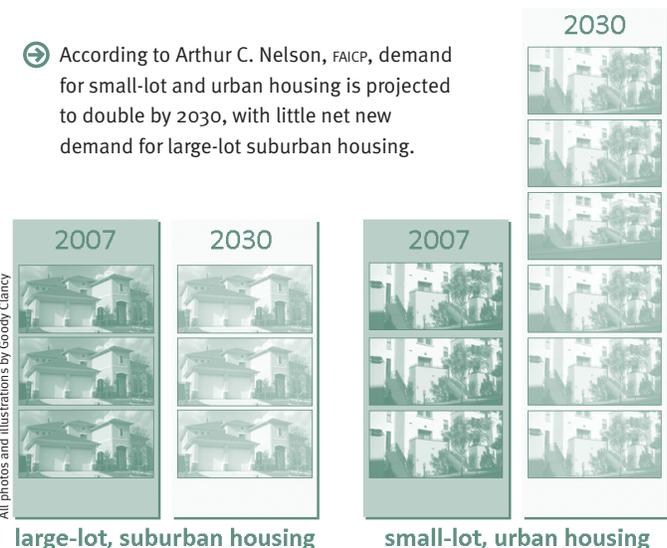
New Opportunities: 2000–2010

Maureen McAvey, executive vice president, Initiatives Group for the Urban Land Institute, says that “demographics are destiny.” Rapid changes in American demographics that crystallized in the late 1990s have reshaped the real estate economy in ways that transform these grayfields, and the corridors they line, into new areas of opportunity.

Shifts in Office and Retail Demand

Retail analyst Michael Berne of MJB Consulting foresees declining prospects for older shopping centers due to increased competition from “category killers” and the Internet. In contrast, significant unmet retail demand exists along traditional main streets and in new mixed

➔ According to Arthur C. Nelson, FAICP, demand for small-lot and urban housing is projected to double by 2030, with little net new demand for large-lot suburban housing.



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About the Author

David Dixon is the principal-in-charge of planning and urban design at Goody Clancy and a coauthor of *Urban Design for an Urban Century* (Wiley, 2009).

use, walkable environments. Real estate consultant Sarah Woodworth of W-ZHA, LLC, foresees little net new demand over the next decade for larger floorplate, suburban office buildings along arterial corridors. However, she identifies significant growing demand from emerging “creative industries” (technology, design, communications) in amenity-rich, walkable environments characteristic of more urban environments. In December, 2010, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that during the first three quarters of 2010, 16 million square feet of suburban office space became vacant, while downtown office vacancy remained essentially unchanged.

Increased Demand for Multifamily Housing

As recently as the 1970s roughly three-quarters of households in the housing market included children. Today, housing analyst Laurie Volk of Zimmerman/Volk Associates reports that half to two-thirds of all households in most regions are singles and couples, and urban qualities like nearby stores, sidewalks, a variety of housing options, and transit now rate highly in neighborhood-preference surveys. Urban economist Chris Nelson points out that America faces a growing shortage of multifamily housing in more urban settings while the stock of large-lot, single-family houses in 2010 already exceeds 2030 demand.

Feasibility and Density

Woodworth notes that owners of older strip developments often have little incentive to redevelop because their developments produce steady, predictable cash flow. As a rough rule of thumb, Woodworth and Nelson both estimate that tripling, or increasing even more, the existing density of strip development is often necessary to incentivize redevelopment. While premiums associated with higher density redevelopment once represented an obstacle, Chris Leinberger, a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution,

reports that mixed use, walkable developments now claim a value premium of 30 to 50 percent over comparable single-use, auto-oriented development in many urban and suburban settings. Carol Coletta, who heads CEOs for Cities, reports that a survey of 24 major metropolitan areas indicates that values for comparable housing increases as walkability increases (as measured by the website www.walkscore.com).

Community Benefits of Corridor Redevelopment

In 2005, John Rahaim, then Seattle’s planning director (now San Francisco’s) estimated that because of demographic shifts the city of Seattle needed 35 percent more housing units to accommodate its 1960 population—and that while 80 percent of housing stock was single family, roughly half the demand was for multifamily housing. At the same time, the city lacked opportunities to accommodate new retail formats and “cool” office space. In many communities, low-density corridors represent the best opportunity to accommodate this demand, concentrate growth as an alternative to sprawl, and promote sustainability.

Higher value mixed use developments produce distinct fiscal benefits. A study for Asheville, North Carolina, by Joe Minacozzi, the new products director of Public Interest Projects, Inc., found that Asheville’s higher density, mixed use redevelopment produced roughly six times more revenue per acre than auto-oriented strips. Goody Clancy planners hear about other advantages. A walkable main street is the top aspiration for many urban and suburban residents—to enhance neighborhood character, provide walk-to amenities, and offer healthier lifestyles. Human resource directors say they have an easier time recruiting educated, skilled employees to walkable, amenity-rich environments—an observation supported by CEOs for Cities research.

CASE STUDIES

There are many models for transforming arterial corridors. In Opa-locka, Florida, a depressed city just outside Miami, the Opa-locka Community Development Corporation has launched a community-based planning initiative to revitalize the Ali Baba Road corridor—now dominated by auto-repair shops—that is attracting significant federal investment. Prince George’s County, Maryland, is completing plans to transform an anonymous stretch of Annapolis Road outside of Washington, D.C., into a transit-oriented district. A proposal in New Orleans’s new Master Plan to remove an elevated expressway and restore the Claiborne Corridor adjacent to downtown is gaining popular support.

These and the three case studies below (located in urban Columbus, Ohio, mature suburbs at the edge of Atlanta, and rapidly growing, suburban Dublin, Ohio) draw on the author’s direct experience. The case-study corridors offer lessons more readily transferable to other communities. They do not depend on federal dollars, major transit investment, or a citywide campaign. Instead they illustrate how three communities used market-driven strategies to redevelop arterial corridors to reap significant community benefits.

While contexts differ, transforming these corridors involved planning and urban design objectives that are applicable to many arterial corridors:

- Sufficient density to transform auto-oriented environments into walkable ones
- Replacing automobile-scaled corridors with defined walkable centers and street grids designed and scaled for pedestrians
- A lively public realm lined with retail or other activities that invite pedestrian use
- A mix of uses that take advantage of multiple markets and contribute to vitality
- Connectivity in terms of physical connections and uses valued by the larger community



➔ In the late 1990s, Ohio State University and the City of Columbus initiated a planning process to reinvigorate High Street, the primary commercial corridor for the University District.

- Transitions in scale, character, and intensity compatible with adjacent neighborhoods
- Planning and design that fosters sustainability

Implementation strategies, while tailored to the unique context of each corridor, shared a similar broad focus:

- Extensive public education to provide the understanding necessary to build support
- Market assessments to assess demand and build the confidence of decision makers
- Urban design visions and guidelines that emphasize placemaking
- Zoning that guides transformation from single-use sites to mixed use districts
- Partnerships to fund higher density, mixed use development
- Innovative transportation solutions to take advantage of higher density, integrated development
- District management that fosters districtwide collaboration

HIGH STREET: A 21ST-CENTURY MAIN STREET

High Street in Columbus, Ohio, began as a trail connecting Native American villages and by the 1920s evolved into a thriving main street serving downtown and many of the city’s most prominent neighborhoods. By the 1970s, suburban competition had taken such a toll that the city demolished nine downtown blocks adjacent to High Street for a suburban-style mall.

Context

A roughly two-mile stretch of High Street serves as the main street for the University District around Ohio State University, home to 50,000 residents and 50,000 employees. By the late 1990s home ownership had declined from 50 percent to 12 percent; an adjacent neighborhood hosted Columbus’s highest concentration of Section 8 housing. High Street had lost 30 percent of its build-

ing stock, and OSU shuttled students to a nearby mall for restaurants and entertainment. Alarmed, OSU launched a partnership with the City of Columbus in 1996—Campus Partners for Community Redevelopment. In 1998 Campus Partners initiated a planning process that produced A Plan for High Street: Creating a 21st-Century Main Street, which OSU and the city adopted in 2000.

Development program

The plan envisioned roughly 500,000 square feet of retail to boost vitality and create the amenity to attract 800,000 square feet of housing and office—half targeted to a mixed used anchor and the remainder targeted to infill sites.

Planning Framework

The plan called for redeveloping blighted and strip retail sites and creating the South Campus Gateway Center (on 10 acres located on four separate blocks) to create a 21st-century main street that has the vitality of a traditional main street and is competitive as a 21st-century commercial district.

Implementation

OSU invested \$25 million to launch the redevelopment, which Campus Partners augmented with New Market Tax Credits and other

equity. Campus Partners engages in planning and development. Full-time staff have development, financing, management, community outreach, and public relations expertise. Campus Partners draws on OSU to provide education and other neighborhood services. Key strategies include the following:

Education. Building community understanding and support was essential and, like the other case studies, involved one-on-one stakeholder meetings, workshops, design charrettes, and public meetings. To overcome widespread skepticism, Campus Partners convened a broadly representative steering committee that met frequently and ultimately provided important support for the plan.

Market. Market studies were essential to building credibility with municipal and OSU leadership and the development community. When local developers balked at the higher density, mixed use Gateway Center project, Campus Partners launched a national developer competition that drew 11 proposals.

Design and design review. Design guidelines, referenced in zoning laws and used by the University District Design Review Board to approve projects, focus on ensuring that all new development, including the Gateway Center, offered the variety of uses, human scale, and articulated massing that enliven traditional main streets.

Zoning. As a city-designated planning district, Campus Partners could replace existing zoning with far more urban standards—greater heights and floor area ratios, buildings that frame streets, retail and other active street-level activities, reducing parking requirements and implementing shared parking, creative signage, and similar changes.

Partnerships. Campus Partners created a parking authority, secured city funding for new sidewalks and streetscape, and secured long-term OSU leases to enhance Campus Gateway’s appeal to lenders.



➔ The South Campus Gateway Center in Columbus, Ohio, has brought main street vitality back to High Street both day and night.

Transportation. Strategies focused on managing impacts on adjacent neighborhoods; securing city support for reduced parking ratios, shared parking, and curbside parking to support retail and buffer pedestrians from traffic; and preserving the opportunity to introduce streetcars.

Management. The plan recommended that Campus Partners undertake the necessary analysis, prepare a business plan, and work with property owners to form a business improvement district.

Results to Date

More than \$275 million has been invested in South Campus Gateway and elsewhere along High Street, and more than \$150 million has been invested in mixed income housing, a new police station, a public elementary school, and an OSU early-childhood learning center.

The Campus Partner’s University District Revitalization project received the American Planning Association’s 2010 National Planning Excellence Award for Implementation in addition to awards from APA Ohio and the Society for College and University Planning.

CLIFTON CORRIDOR: CENTER FOR A VIBRANT COMMUNITY

Outside of Atlanta, a series of Native American pathways evolved into rural roads serving agricultural villages. In the late 19th century a founder of Coca-Cola developed an Olmsted-designed garden suburb, Druid Hills, and opened the area for development. By 1950 the Clifton Corridor was lined with verdant suburbs and bucolic campuses. By the 1980s the corridor was indistinguishable from other strip-development corridors.

Context

The Clifton Corridor consists of a series of connected arterial highways—Clifton Road, North Decatur Road, and Clairmont Road—which are constantly congested and not served by rail transit. It has some of America’s highest pedestrian fatality rates and faces deteriorating air and water quality. Concerned that the corridor’s auto-oriented setting would not appeal to the next generation of students, faculty, staff, and researchers—and eager to contribute to sustainable smart growth—Emory University reached out to nearby neighborhoods to form the Clifton Community Partnership in 2006. In 2008 the CCP published the Clifton Corridor Urban Design Guidelines—a vision and strategies for transforming the corridor “from a mid-20th-century automobile-centered suburb into a 21st-century walkable community,”

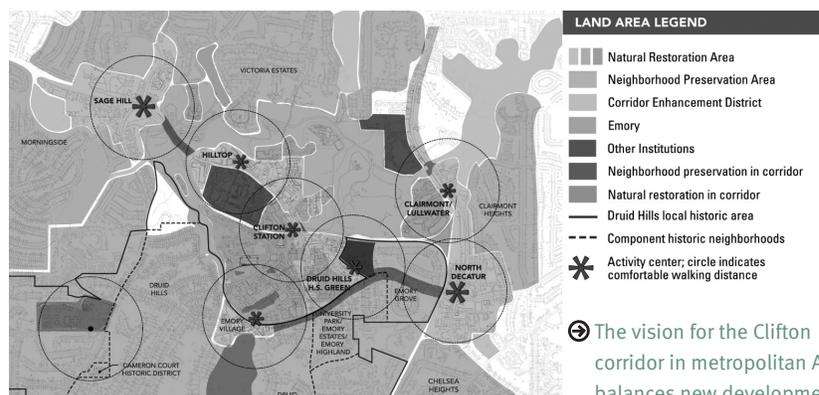
preserving the character of existing suburban neighborhoods, and restoring the degraded natural environment.

Development program

The preferred vision included approximately 10 million square feet of mixed use development. Community members requested multifamily housing options that enable younger people to move into the neighborhood and older residents to remain.

Planning framework

The guidelines called for the transformation of strip retail and shopping centers into 10 distinct character areas including five “activity centers” that form the vibrant heart of a community seeking to manage growth.



“enhancement districts”—including five activity centers) with preserving existing neighborhoods and restoring natural areas.

Implementation

The CCP lacks the funding and staffing that empower Campus Partners, but it has brought Emory and the community together around a single agenda to influence public policy and private investment. Key strategies include the following:

Education. Druid Hills has long found itself at odds with Emory. The CCP represents a conscious effort to bridge this divide. Initially skeptical, residents found that both sides aspired to walkable, mixed use environments. The guidelines represent a “social compact” that documents agreements on uses, character, and scale of development along the corridor.

Market. Participants and decision makers had confidence that Atlanta’s closer-in suburbs face strong growth pressures. DeKalb County is expected to add 200,000 people (and roughly 75,000 housing units) by 2025.

Design and design review. The guidelines divide the corridor into 10 distinct character zones and provide for each one

a vision, principles, development goals, public- and private-realm design guidelines, and conceptual plans and illustrative before-and-after studies.

Zoning. The DeKalb County comprehensive plan identifies policy goals for defined town centers, including walkability, buildings that frame streets with pedestrian-friendly uses, a “high-density mix of retail, office, services, and employment uses” in a compact center, and reduced dependence on autos. The guidelines provide specific direction for achieving these goals in each character zone and require new development to restore nearby degraded natural environments.

Partnerships. Emory formed a partnership to create the first redevelopment—an amenity-rich, mixed use development that

includes 800 units of housing for faculty and staff within a five-minute walk of campus.

Transportation. Initial traffic concerns turned to support after a transportation study reported that mixed use developments generate roughly 44 percent less traffic than conventional strip development, noted that reducing lane width to accommodate bike lanes slowed travel speeds, demonstrated that traffic associated with community-oriented redevelopment displaced through-traffic to regional highways, and indicated that curbside parking and street trees (discouraged by Georgia DOT) could work along this heavily traveled corridor.

Management. The CCP will maintain ongoing responsibility as an advocate, convener, and sponsor for corridor initiatives. It has also set up a communitywide information network.

Results to date

The \$250 million Emory-sponsored mixed use “Emory Point” LEED-ND development received zoning approval. DeKalb County



➡ The Clifton Community Partnership hopes that curbside parking, new street trees, and retail will transform a heavily used arterial into a walkable main street—a goal that will require further coordination with Georgia DOT.



government has initiated rezoning. The Atlanta Regional Commission’s Livable Communities Initiative has used the guidelines as a model for other community planning initiatives, and the guidelines received 2010 Honor Awards from the Congress for the New Urbanism and the Society for College and University Planning.

BRIDGE STREET CORRIDOR: A NEW SUBURBAN DOWNTOWN

The Bridge Street Corridor in Dublin, Ohio, began as a rural road connecting agricultural villages. By 1810 the small village of Dublin had taken root at the point where Bridge Street crosses the Scioto River, about 10 miles from downtown Columbus.

Context

Dublin is not Ohio’s wealthiest suburb by chance. The credit goes to a tradition of innovative planning and development policies that anticipate market shifts. From the 1970s to ’90s Jack Nicklaus golf courses and Class A office parks positioned Dublin as a premier housing and office market. A village of 2,500 in 1960 grew into a suburb that calls itself a city; almost 50,000 people live and work there. Thanks to Ohio’s two percent municipal tax on employee earnings, Dublin’s schools, public services, libraries, recreational facilities, and other amenities top national surveys. In 2008 the city’s leadership determined that it was time to innovate again. Transforming outmoded office parks and failed shopping centers into a walkable, mixed use, amenity-rich downtown would attract the next generation of employees, employers, and residents. In October 2010, the city council approved the Bridge Street Corridor Study: A New Era of Opportunity to guide redevelopment.

Development Program

Market studies conducted during the current recession indicated demand for 10 to 15 million square feet of mixed use development over the next 20 to 25 years—half to two-thirds

lofts and similar high-quality multifamily housing with stronger initial demand for market-rate rental housing. Multifamily housing represents roughly one-third of all housing demand for Dublin over the next 10 years—a dramatic shift from past decades. Demand for retail and office space is also shifting toward a preference for walkable environments.

Planning Framework

The study calls for a walkable, mixed use, higher density downtown consisting of four distinctive activity centers and three urban neighborhoods, each with its own personality, connected by an arterial road transformed into a walkable main street.

Implementation

Dublin has assigned a deputy city manager to lead internal coordination planning, transportation, environmental, economic development, finance, and other city agencies. The city has commissioned follow-up zoning, transporta-

tion, environmental, utility, and fiscal studies to shape specific implementation policies. Key strategies include the following:

Education. Nationally prominent speakers helped build public understanding and met directly with city council members and property owners. Chris Leinberger described the real estate market dynamics that fueled growing demand for “walkable urbanism” and noted that these investments were far less vulnerable to new competition than “drivable suburbanism.” Carol Coletta spoke about America’s growing shortage of talented knowledge workers and the increasing economic development importance of creating amenity-rich, walkable environments that attract and help retain these workers and the industries that employ them.

Market. Market studies provided critical credibility for a suburban community not accustomed to higher density development and to property owners who understood that mixed use creates value.

➡ (Right) The plan for the Bridge Street corridor in Dublin, Ohio, includes four “district centers” and three urban “neighborhoods” connected by an arterial road transformed into a walkable main street. (Below) Density and parks are both essential ingredients for a vibrant corridor that enhances quality of life for the entire community.



PLANNING AND URBAN DESIGN OBJECTIVES	HIGH STREET	CLIFTON CORRIDOR	BRIDGE STREET CORRIDOR
<p>Densities that support walkability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Net densities of 40 to 60 housing units per acre and corresponding commercial FARs of 1.5 to 2.5 (threshold supports informal interaction, casual trips on foot) • Densities achieved using three- to five-story buildings (familiar scale, continuity to nearby neighborhoods, and avoiding high-rise cost premiums) • Shared parking strategies (enables increased densities on smaller lots and shared use for uses with different peak needs) 	<p>Tripled the retail and doubled the floor space lining High Street</p>	<p>Three activity nodes represent transit ready development opportunities</p>	<p>Five- to tenfold increase over recently approved auto-dependent development densities</p>
<p>Defined walkable centers and street grids scaled to pedestrians</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One to four distinct centers created along each corridor—sized for a maximum 10-minute walk (half-mile) and connected by higher density, walkable redevelopment along arterial roads • Maximum block size in centers 300 to 400 ft. 	<p>Streets connecting to neighborhoods reopened—traffic management to avoid impacts</p>	<p>Two large shopping centers subdivided into more than 30 blocks—including square and parks</p>	<p>Street grid subdivided larger sites but avoided fragmenting small sites. Some blocks structured parking lined by housing (roughly 200- to 300-ft. width plus sidewalks)</p>
<p>A public realm that invites walkability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retail or other “active” uses (artist studios, community spaces, lifelong learning, entertainment, etc.) encouraged everywhere and mandated along “main streets” in centers • Town houses with street entries at street level for multifamily housing • Parking structures located behind buildings or lined with housing and retail facing streets 	<p>Active uses mandated facing High Street (no internal atriums); drive-through businesses add outdoor seating and pedestrian-scaled signage</p>	<p>Emory buildings and campus will engage, rather than step back from, adjacent community</p>	<p>Higher density, mixed use buildings announce the transition to pedestrian-oriented environment</p>
<p>A mix of uses that contributes to vitality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing represents more than half of the mix (supports neighborhood-serving retail, day/night activity) • Cinemas, music, cafes, and similar amenities contribute to vitality attracts housing and office • Mix of uses responds to changing markets 	<p>Entertainment and arts created university-community character</p>	<p>New university bookstore is an integral to revitalizing an activity center</p>	<p>Mixed use, walk-to-work opportunities attract employees—and grow Dublin’s employment base</p>
<p>Physical and social connectivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Street, bike, and pedestrian connections to adjacent neighborhoods • Lively public squares, cultural, and civic uses make redevelopment integral to the life of the larger community 	<p>Arts cinema, super-market, mom-and-pop retailers engage different demographics; jobs program benefits nearby residents</p>	<p>Mixed use centers located within a 10- to 15-minute walk of every neighborhood</p>	<p>Scioto River reserved as a “central park”; city hall and central library relocated to new “town green”</p>
<p>Transitions to adjacent neighborhoods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building heights step down • Parking and other traffic generators located along busy streets 	<p>Reopened streets include neighborhood-oriented retail</p>	<p>Redevelopment preserves all residential blocks</p>	<p>Nearby subdivisions requested walkable connections to downtown</p>
<p>Planning and design that foster sustainability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects framed as a smart growth initiatives • New zoning offers opportunity to create model green districts • Centers form potential eco-districts (enable buildings to share energy and graywater) 	<p>More than half redevelopment replaces surface parking</p>	<p>Emory/community partnership will maintain area’s tree canopy, restore natural areas and streams, and manage stormwater</p>	<p>Primary focus for Dublin’s new sustainability manager</p>

Design and design review. Dublin has asked Goody Clancy to prepare a pattern book. The city is also developing a new design review and approvals process that places greater stress on a “district” approach that emphasizes continuity, interaction between buildings and the public realm, the role that design and programming both play in placemaking, and similar qualities that focus on the quality of both the district as a whole and individual buildings and public spaces.

Zoning. Clarion Associates, Farr Associates, and McBride Dale Clarion are preparing new zoning that mixes form-based and performance requirements with a strong focus on defining uses and design appropriate for main street, neighborhood, and other types of streets. Dublin intends to simplify

approvals by conveying intent as well as specific requirements for every part of the district. Where essential to achieve placemaking goals, the code will provide density incentives to aggregate fragmented ownerships.

Partnerships. Dublin will partner with developers to build, or fund, much of the shared infrastructure—street grids, parks, parking, a reconfigured highway interchange, bike paths, a “green stormwater system,” and similar elements, and will recapture the costs of these investments through TIF and similar mechanisms.

Transportation. Nelson\Nygaard is preparing a district-transportation model that incorporates reduced trip-generation assumptions associated with mixed use development. The model will be used to identify

phased transportation improvements and develop a transit strategy.

Management. A team that includes leaders from all city agencies involved in corridor redevelopment meets weekly to coordinate city policy, investment, and other actions.

Results to date

Two major landowners—a 50-acre failed shopping center and 75-acre nonprofit campus—have announced redevelopment plans totaling more than five million square feet. The nonprofit has selected Forest City as a master developer.

CONCLUSIONS

As America moves out of the recent recession, arterial corridors represent a new frontier—an opportunity to invest in reinforcing existing communities rather than draining resources to peripheral greenfields. None of these transformative plans moved forward without strong leadership, a commitment to community-based planning, and a willingness to explore innovative approaches to implementation that broke with familiar practices. These are resources that many communities already possess or can develop. The case study corridors demonstrate how many communities can tap growing markets to generate significant economic, social, and environmental benefits.

The 75-acre Crocker Park mixed use development has given suburban Westlake, Ohio, a pedestrian-oriented town center where none existed before. ©Dan Tasman; design concept by Lisa Barton.

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IS IT TIME TO RETHINK
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COMMERCIAL STRIPS?

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