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ENABLING BETTER PLACES  
COMMERCIAL CORRIDORS  
AND SHOPPING CENTERS



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Bates Alley, Kalamazoo MI, image credit: City of Kalamazoo

**Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible;  
and suddenly you're doing the impossible.** (Francis of Assisi)

As baby boomers age and more of the millennial generation enters adulthood, an increasing number of Americans would like to live in more centrally-located, walkable environments. Yet the post-war auto-dependent development pattern exists in nearly every city and town in the US, whether it makes up the entirety of a newer municipality, or the edges of a community with a traditional downtown. These landscapes have come to epitomize what many Michigan communities have a desire to transform, from places built for the car and accessible only by car to walkable, vibrant, and sustainable places and neighborhoods.

Across the country, evolving suburban landscapes represent enormous opportunities to creatively rethink the built and natural environment. *Suburban landscapes* describes the low density, single use conditions that can be found in any geographic area: rural towns, city limits, or suburbs. Rescaling these places for pedestrians can help them to become better places, restoring activity in the street and creating lively, prosperous places to live and work. Michigan cities and towns seek to increase housing, transportation, and lifestyle options—to enhance the quality of life in a community as well as preserve natural resources and enable continued economic growth. A community that identifies opportunities to create new walkable places through targeted redevelopment of suburban areas can inject new taxable value into the budget—while making efficient use of existing infrastructure.

Despite mounting evidence in favor of this kind of suburban redevelopment, many local leaders remain uncertain about how to begin. The challenge feels enormous, and identifying the best strategies to address the challenge can seem overwhelming for many communities. [\*Putting People First: 10 Steps to Pedestrian Friendly Suburbs\*](#) (see summary on p. 7) provides a strategic analysis of the actions local governments could take to tackle the multi-layered regulations, existing infrastructure investments, financial system biases, and private development proformas that seem to work in concert against reforming land use patterns.

Essential to this process is addressing the problematic land use regulations that create these outdated and undesirable suburban landscapes in the first place. Codes and ordinances—zoning codes, street standards, subdivision regulations, and more—serve as the default legal structure for the development and redevelopment that occurs in most communities, determining

land use patterns and transportation priorities that lead to the dysfunctional sprawl that many communities would like to transform. Most of these existing codes and ordinances make it illegal to replicate a beloved street or neighborhood, and instead force development to undergo difficult processes, requiring special permits and extensive review, just to create the walkable, mixed-use neighborhood that communities want more of.

In response to these concerns, the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), the Michigan Municipal League (MML), and the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU) collaborated to develop [\*\*Enabling Better Places: Commercial Corridors and Shopping Centers\*\*](#). It is a resource for Michigan communities looking to provide place-specific incremental code changes to low-density and aging retail landscapes that address the most problematic barriers first, build political will, and ultimately create more walkable, prosperous, and equitable places for people of all ages.

Each Michigan community has challenges and opportunities in enabling better places. However, similar geographic, economic, and cultural forces have resulted in common concerns regarding local zoning codes. This is a resource that recognizes, communities need tools to preserve their unique qualities and characteristics; and can find great benefit in a regulatory framework that is more resilient against economic challenges and more responsive to future opportunities.

**Enabling Better Places: Commercial Corridors and Shopping Centers** is a companion document to MEDC's (and MML and CNU's) [\*Enabling Better Places: User's Guide to Zoning Reform\*](#), which is directed toward essential code changes for Main Streets, downtowns, and adjacent neighborhoods. As a set, these two documents provide essential code changes for the majority of Michigan's built environment to enable local governments to incrementally address difficult coding barriers to enable more walkable and prosperous urbanism.

While the challenge may seem enormous, certain strategies for transforming shopping centers and retail corridors are more effective than others. The recommendations in [\*\*Enabling Better Places: Commercial Corridors and Shopping Centers\*\*](#) focus on those areas where intervention is most likely to enable walkable, vibrant places, offering the following resources:

# INTRODUCTION

- Overview of the application of incremental code reform within the suburban context
  - Analysis of the comprehensive steps communities can take to reform land use patterns
  - Summary of the unique challenges to reforming commercial corridors and shopping centers
  - How to use this guide within the different place types
  - Complicating factors that pertain to code reform within the suburban context
- Strategic principles of code reform
- Text amendments that may be made based upon context, staff, and political capacity
  - The amendments are organized by content
  - They are further refined by strategic effort to implement, e.g. tame, evolve, and transform
- Resources
  - Samples of success stories in implementing suburban retrofit
  - Additional resources on reforming suburban land use patterns within the state of Michigan
  - Outside resources on code reform

This Guide does not make recommendations for residential subdivisions; it does make recommendations for corridors, shopping centers, and business parks. It focuses on those places in a community where incremental zoning reform is going to give the most return on invested effort.

Transforming outdated and aging landscapes—whether in the suburbs or downtown centers—is a 21st century priority to help communities meet the challenges of demographic and economic shifts, pressures from a changing climate, and pressing health concerns. MEDC, with its Redevelopment Ready Communities® (RRC®) program, is a step in helping all Michigan communities realize their prosperous and sustainable futures.



*Parsons Alley, Duluth GA, image credit: Kronberg Wall*

## Incremental Steps Toward Pedestrian-Friendly Suburbs\*

Reforming places in your community that have a suburban, auto-oriented, single-use development pattern can feel like an overwhelming task. As the adage states, the best way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time. Reorienting suburban neighborhoods for pedestrians requires an incremental yet integrated approach, calibrated to local needs, prioritized according to public aspirations, and targeted to specific areas within the community. There are proven techniques to draw from, which communities across the country have used to rescale significant parts of their sprawling suburbs into thriving social hubs.

- **Share a Vision and Draft a Plan:** Identifying specific goals can help a community understand what they are and where they want to grow and change. You need to know where you want to go before you determine how you'll get there.
- **Identify Existing Assets:** Valuing what you have as a community is an important step in understanding what you are and where you can go. Each city and town has unique structures or systems or resources that can be leveraged to empower change.
- **Leverage Infrastructure Investments:** Public investments can lead to private investments and new development, but local governments need to carefully align their leverage with the goals of their community and the outcomes they are seeking.
- **Align Codes and Ordinances:** Regulations can make or break the manner in which a community is able to grow and change. Rescaling suburban environments relies on codes and ordinances prioritizing people over cars and mixed-use over monocultures.
- **Get the Streets Right:** Streets are fundamental to the successful reordering of priority when improving an outdated suburban environment. Right-sizing suburban streets can invite new investment, encourage new uses, and even create new developable land.
- **Get the Parking Right:** In an antiquated suburban environment, neatly aligned with mis-designed streets is mis-allocated parking. Relocating and simply reducing parking is a central step in adapting from placeless sprawl to walkable urbanism.
- **Add More Green:** Suburbs were conceived as bucolic oases of landscape, when in most cases suburban environments are dominated by massive zones of hostile hardscape. Revitalization with the help of public green spaces can be a transformative tool.
- **Change Land Use:** Adaptive reuse is an important task in rescaling and revitalizing outdated land use, and the suburban environment is no different. Offering an alternative vision for existing buildings engages developers in a community's vision for change.
- **Anticipate What's Next:** The process of rescaling suburban communities can be long and difficult, but seeing the road ahead will help a municipality measure their success, manage development outcomes, and maintain a sense of place amidst change.

Additional detail on every step can be found throughout this document and are hyperlinked to their location. For examples of suburban retrofit success stories, see *Section 3: Resources* of this document.

\*Summarized from "Putting People First: 10 Steps Toward Pedestrian-Friendly Suburbs" by Lynn Richards (*Land Lines*, July 2014). A number of direct passages from the original article have been included throughout this document.

# SUBURBAN CONTEXT

## Reforming Commerical Corridors and Shopping Centers

Transformational change is hard! Most communities have hundreds, if not thousands, of acres zoned for retail and other commercial uses, often spread continuously and uniformly along a corridor, or grouped in large parcels at the intersection of major thoroughfares, all developed for ease of automobile access.

Unlike infill and redevelopment in an urban context such as a Downtown or Main Street with an intact, interconnected street and block network, commercial corridors and shopping centers typically were not developed with the pedestrian in mind. They have little development hierarchy and have buildings (and signs) scaled to fast-moving automobile traffic, minimal public realm or pedestrian infrastructure, limited street connectivity, and an over-emphasis on abundant, visible, and “free” parking. Both parcel sizes and ownership patterns can often be described as a patchwork quilt.

While the existence of utility infrastructure can make these areas seem like prime targets for redevelopment, the self-contained nature of this style of development, lack of public streets and sidewalks, scale of corridors, and the volume and speed of traffic, all create significant hurdles to creating new walkable places. The ability (financial, legal, or political) for the public sector to initiate complete redevelopment in these contexts is rare.

At the same time, these parcels represent excellent opportunities to integrate street level stormwater management—also known as green infrastructure—to parking lots, shopping centers, streets, and corridors. Adding rain gardens, swales, or even functional landscaping can help tame these concrete jungles while helping communities meet their stormwater regulatory requirements.

How can communities best enable such revitalization? Where and how should they start?



A community can first identify corridors that are suitable for this transformation. Not all corridors are the same. Some are well suited for a mix of uses and walkability (with potential connections to existing residential areas); while others will remain auto-dominated for the foreseeable future.

Similarly, some shopping centers are ripe for redevelopment while others are no longer economically viable. A range of factors are at play. The location, composition of nearby businesses, political climate, and underlying economic conditions all need to be considered.

When considering the revitalization or redevelopment of these areas, the community needs to establish priorities. Is there a logical place to start? How much change is desired? When and where should limited public resources be invested? Can the private sector undertake the desired redevelopment within the current regulatory system? Will the local market support the redevelopment that is desired/envisioned? Is there leadership to carry through what may be a slow pace of tangible results?

To put it simply, the starting point is actually to undertake some basic planning: assess existing conditions, understand the local market dynamics, establish goals and priorities, review/evaluate the traffic and transportation conditions, and determine where zoning or other policy changes are needed to enable the type of place envisioned. Identifying the scope of change desired is a fundamental step and is addressed in greater detail below in *Using this Guide*.

Large-scale redevelopment aimed at transforming dead or dying shopping centers and business parks will require additional, fine-grained planning (by the private sector or public/private partnership) in order to create a street and block network, define the public realm, establish a development hierarchy, break down the scale of development, and move from a monoculture to a mixed-use environment. Incremental change requires leadership with both vision and patience; there are no quick fixes, and changes can take time to have a measured effect.



*Before and after of Lancaster Boulevard, Lancaster CA, image credit: City of Lancaster*





*Charrette in Brunswick GA, image credit: CNU*

## Incremental Step: Share a Vision and Draft a Plan

Many communities start their reform efforts by imagining how they want to grow and then developing a community-wide master plan, or one or more area plans, to realize that vision. Regional and neighborhood plans engage community members in a dialogue about where to target infrastructure investments and leverage redevelopment opportunities as they become available, and can even identify opportunities for temporary activation. Building a shared sense of purpose for a place within the community, or for the community as a whole, can be a powerful incentive for guiding future change.

Consider Midvale Slag and Sharon Steel, two adjacent Superfund sites about 10 miles south of Salt Lake City in Midvale, Utah. Both underwent cleanup at approximately the same time, but only one is thriving.

In 2000, the Midvale City Council adopted the “Bingham Junction Reuse Assessment and Master Plan” for the 446-acre Midvale Slag site. City officials worked with residents, EPA officials, and other stakeholders to devise a strategy for redeveloping the site into a mixed-use commercial, residential, and recreation area. Now thriving, Bingham Junction created approximately 600 jobs, \$1.5 million in annual property tax revenues, and a \$131 million increase in the value of the site property (EPA 2011). Families have moved into new condominiums and another 2,500 residential units are planned. Office buildings, a supermarket, and other stores have followed, and the community anticipates developing up to two million square feet of commercial office and retail space.

In contrast, the 250-acre Sharon Steel site, which did not have a redevelopment plan or future vision, remains vacant. Building on the success of Bingham Junction, however, city officials have begun the planning and visioning process.



Storrs Center, Mansfield CT, image credit: Leyland Alliance

# USING THIS GUIDE

This Guide is structured to enable a planning department and local government to address a series of steps in determining where and how to engage in the code reform process and enact change. By understanding what a community has, what locations are best for change, and what the scope of reform should be before beginning the process, municipalities can best prepare to enable those specific changes that they desire and that respond best to their local challenges.

## Task A: Determine The Placetypes You Have

Most Michigan communities include multiple commercial corridors and shopping centers. *Section 2* of this guide outlines a series of Place Types which draw distinctions between certain commercial corridors and shopping centers based on their characteristics.

Commercial corridors take on multiple forms from pre-1950's shopping streets to wide highway corridors. These Place Types are shallow in depth, typically extending only one parcel deep on either side of the street. Commercial corridors often extend for many miles, requiring careful targeting of efforts. Corridor types differ based on the conditions of the roadway and the average size and configuration of parcels along its length.

Where the corridor is calm, pre-1950's shopping streets are within the scope of Main Streets as detailed in [Enabling Better Places: Users' Guide to Zoning Reform](#). While the Main Street term may feel foreign, most pre-1950's shopping streets were historically of a Main Street format, typically located along streetcar lines. Cities and villages may have multiple neighborhood shopping streets, in addition to a more substantial Main Street. Solutions for both of these conditions are typically the same.

Most commercial corridors include or are adjacent to shopping centers. Where both are targeted for redevelopment, the strategies along the corridor and within the shopping center need to be carefully coordinated.

Shopping centers include multiple large, single-use areas such as business parks, civic centers, and technology parks, along with neighborhood commercial centers and power centers. These Place Types are large—over 10 acres—and offer significant redevelopment opportunities.

## Task B: Target Locations For Change

Changing regulations indicates the municipality's intent for and support of redevelopment in a particular location. Most Michigan communities have several of the corridor and shopping center place-types described in the following pages. Many may be functioning well and require little public attention; others may be struggling economically, or grossly under-utilizing important corridors or sites. Locations for change and investment must be carefully selected to maximize potential success.

In most cases, along corridors in particular, successful change will require public sector funding of improvements to support private investment. As a result, public support of redevelopment is limited, and must be targeted. In addition, commercial corridors tend to continue for many miles, which is far beyond the  $\frac{1}{4}$  -  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile distance that can be sustained in a walkable format. Focus on a key section of corridor, perhaps one adjacent to walkable conditions, where market opportunity exists and buildings are ripe for reinvestment.

Redeveloping a single shopping center or  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile of commercial corridor is a first step which can be expanded upon through subsequent efforts. Consider the character of the corridor: can it be tamed and will controlling agencies support and fund physical roadway changes? Consider the ownership pattern: are property owners interested in or resistant to change? Target limited areas and build upon success over time.

If the community has a traditional downtown, reinforcing and building on that pattern will typically be an easier way of creating a walkable place than starting from scratch within the suburban place types. Evaluate whether the zoning regulations governing the mainstreet, downtown, and adjacent neighborhoods need to be updated prior to addressing the challenges of the surrounding corridors and shopping centers.

A community consensus may emerge to focus public efforts on upgrading one or several specific places or entire place-type categories. If so, how do planners recommend the most promising approach for deploying a community's limited resources?

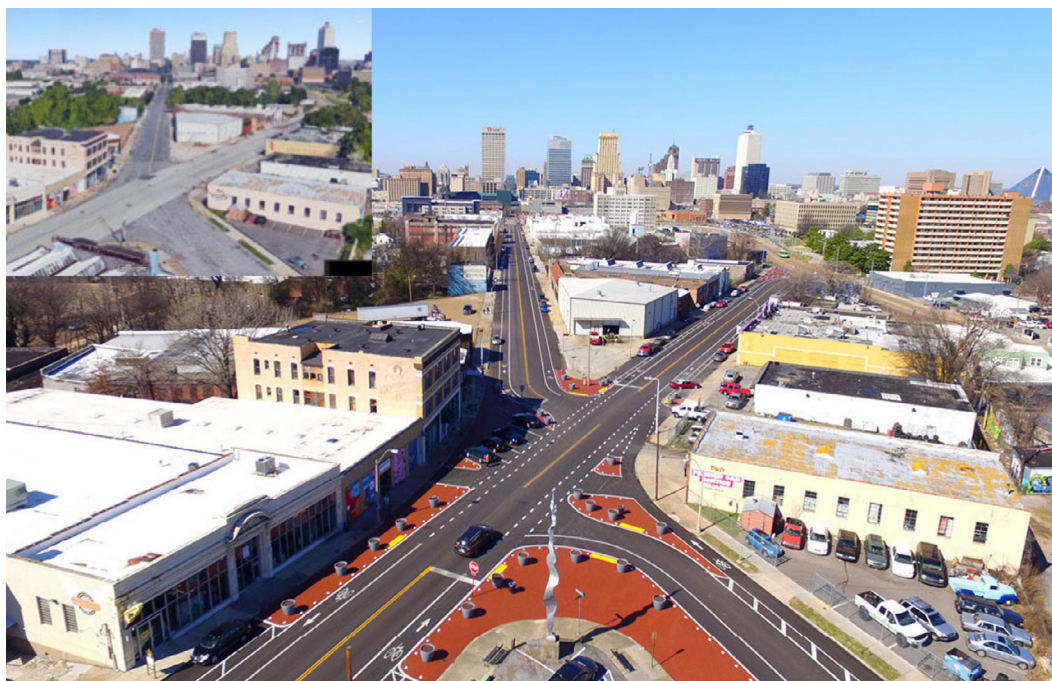
# USING THIS GUIDE

## Incremental Step: Identify Existing Assets

The following kinds of questions can help local governments, struggling to determine where to focus their initial efforts, identify which assets to leverage.

1. Is public transit available? If so, are there underutilized areas near or immediately adjacent to transit stops that could be redeveloped to enhance accessibility?
2. Where will existing infrastructure dollars be spent—for example, on roads, water, sewers, schools, civic structures, and/or parks?
3. Are there vacant or underutilized parking lots, buildings, or strip malls near these infrastructure investments?
4. Which of these areas have redevelopment plans in place or neighborhood support for new development?
5. Which of these areas are near or adjacent to other public assets and potential partners, such as schools, libraries, parks, hospitals and other institutions, or open spaces?
6. Can any of these sites align with existing or emerging employment areas?
7. Are any of these properties available for redevelopment (i.e., are any owners willing to collaborate with the community on redevelopment goals and plans)?

This proposed assessment is not a linear, step-by-step process. Sometimes a site may become unavailable unexpectedly or a federal grant may come through for road improvements on a major arterial. In other situations, an owner may be unwilling to cooperate or a site may be deemed unfeasible. In any case, an assessment of existing conditions can help to target potential sites or neighborhoods as priorities.



*After years of disinvestment and suburbanization of the Marshall and Monroe Avenue corridors, which are surrounded by anchor employment and cultural institutions, the Memphis Medical District Collaborative (MMDC) is overseeing the development of new affordable and mixed-income housing within a framework of streets that are being made walkable again.*

*Marshall and Monroe intersection, Medical District, Memphis TN, image credit: Chris Porter for MMDC*

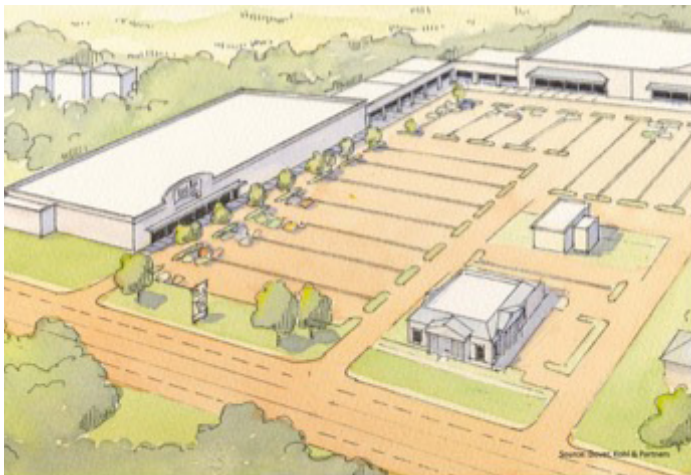
# USING THIS GUIDE

## Task C: Determine the Scope

The suburban condition may be mitigated with various levels of intervention. The community must ask if the goal is to limit the damage being perpetuated by existing zoning regulations, enabling better conditions over time, or supporting the complete transformation of a specific area. This Guide describes these three levels of intervention as tame, evolve, and transform. This work is a continuum: the efforts that a community does to tame a corridor now may set the stage for evolving that same corridor in a few years.

### Tame

The first intervention is to simply limit the proliferation of early 20th-century zoning damage. This includes simple text amendments that reduce front setbacks, reduce parking requirements, and simplify uses. It can also include simple improvements to the existing infrastructure such as adding green infrastructure to existing parking lots, shopping centers, or corridors.



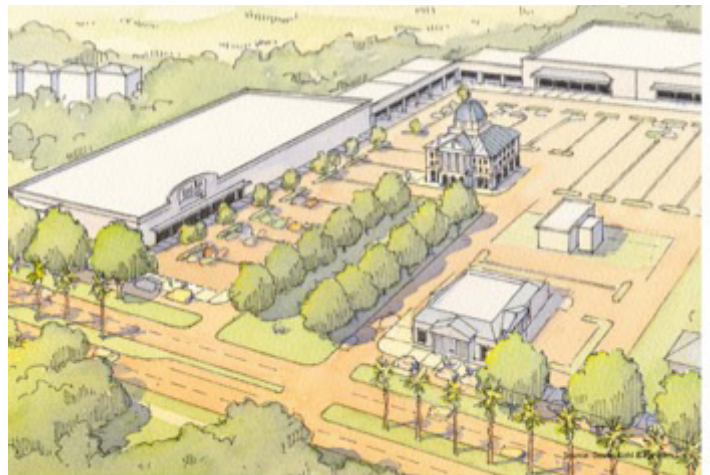
Existing

### Evolve

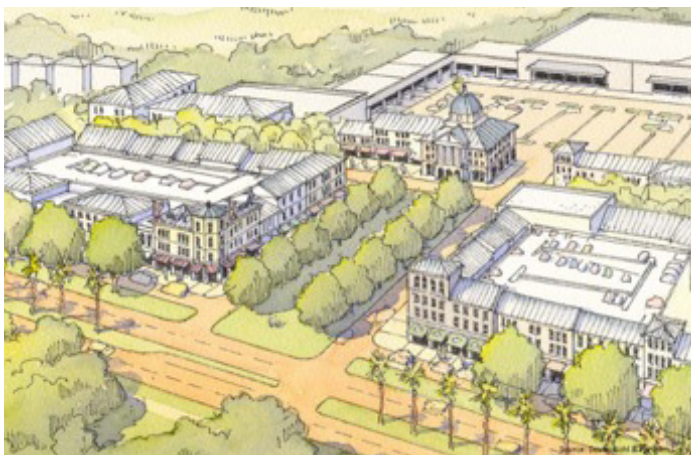
The next level of change enables an area to incrementally improve over time and requires more robust code changes. These changes may include restricting parking locations, greening the streets, permitting multi-family in commercial districts, and right-sizing streets.

### Transform

The most robust change requires the most resources. The decision to transform an area requires planning in addition to regulatory activities, and in some cases public investment in streetscape or other improvements. While this level of intervention is beyond many of the incremental steps in this Guide, it is the ultimate outcome that successive steps can achieve.



Tame



Evolve



Transform

All images of Boundary Street Master Plan and Code proposal for Beaufort SC, image credit: Dover Kohl & Partners

# USING THIS GUIDE

## Task D: Gauge Capacity

After determining the scope of change, the local government must consider its capacity to address the desired scope. Simple text amendments may be done on the most constrained budgets while transformative scopes usually require public-private partnerships. Robust transformation requires changes in infrastructure such as the reduction in number and width of travel lanes, greening a street, and the creation of new streets to increase connectivity. It is unlikely the private sector will do this alone

and in the most successful case studies, local government is a partner in public infrastructure investment.

After determining the political will and fiscal capacity required by the scope, a scope adjustment may be required—either changing the degree of intervention planned or selecting a location where a meaningful change can be made within available capacity.

## Incremental Step: Anticipate What's Next

The process of rescaling suburban communities can be long and difficult, but there are a number of possible starting points—from visioning and planning, to making infrastructure investments, to building the first project. As municipalities begin, leaders should keep several issues in mind:

- Determine how to measure success. A clear, measurable objective for a corridor redevelopment or revamped strip mall can be critical to ensuring that the project stays on track. Is the goal to increase retail sales, transit ridership, or affordable housing? During the course of a project, city commissions and planning, zoning, and transportation boards will need to make seemingly minor decisions—such as increasing or decreasing allowed parking—with potentially major effects. Municipalities are more likely to reach their long-term goals if they clearly articulate and define the measures of success from the outset.
- Manage redeveloped places for all income and age groups. Many cities and towns are leveraging expanded transit lines to transform their suburban landscapes, which will attract more minorities, lower-income residents, and young people in search of walkable neighborhoods. Municipalities need to plan accordingly and accommodate these new demographics with affordable housing, employment opportunities, and retail options.
- Respect and celebrate local and regional uniqueness. Fundamentally, compelling neighborhoods have a strong sense of place, with unique streetscapes, architectural styles, or public art. As communities transform their suburban landscapes, leaders can allow neighborhoods to grow organically and authentically—and avoid replacing generic malls with generic town centers that lack local character and might fare no better over the long run as a result.

America's evolving suburban landscapes represent enormous opportunities to creatively rethink the nation's built and natural environments. Rescaling these places for pedestrians can help restore activity in the street and create lively, prosperous places to live, work, and play.

## Complicating Factors

Site-specific complicating factors need to be identified early in the process. Some may create a serious roadblock; others may be addressed with routine interventions. Multiple complicating factors may trigger a redefinition of the focus area, a switch to a different location, or different project goals. Complicating factors may include items like ownership issues, state stormwater regulations, state roads, or lot depth as discussed later in this section.

Once the initial evaluation is complete, readers are directed to the *Resources* section of this report, which identifies a series of best coding practices to achieve a community's goals for corridors and shopping centers, whether those goals are to tame (stage 1), evolve (stage 2), or transform (stage 3).

# CONCEPT DEFINITIONS

## Blank Walls



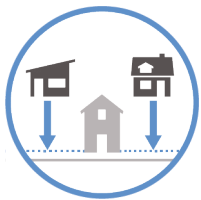
An expanse of wall without clear windows or doors. People are less likely to walk along blank walls and the sidewalks may become unsafe. Blank walls longer than 30 feet at ground level damage the vibrancy of the public realm.

## Green Infrastructure



Green infrastructure describes measures that use plant or soil systems to store, infiltrate, or evapotranspire stormwater and reduce flows to sewer systems or to surface waters. In many shopping centers and corridors, these measures can easily be integrated into existing parking lots, streets, corridors, or any area that has excess pavement.

## Build-To [Line]



A regulatory limit that defines both a minimum and a maximum setback for the fronts of buildings.

## Liner Building



A shallow building that hides parking or blank walls from view. A liner building maintains a pleasant, walkable streetscape instead of exposing parking/service areas or blank walls to the sidewalk and street.

## Complete Streets



Streets, sidewalks, and paths that safely serve users of all ages and abilities and that fully integrate neighborhoods with shopping, employment, and civic features.

## Mixed-Use Pattern



A development pattern where complementary uses of land are located within walking distance.

## Encroachment



Any structural element that breaks the plane of a vertical or horizontal regulatory limit, extending into a setback, into the public right-of-way, or above a height limit. Encroachment is often used to describe awnings, signs, and balconies that project over sidewalks. It is also used to align buildings by their facade, allowing porches and similar elements to extend forward from the facade.

## Mixed-Use Building



A building that includes complementary uses within a single building, often retail uses at ground level and offices or residences above.

## Facade Transparency



The percentage of transparent window glass or other openings in a building's facade along a street frontage, relative to the surface area of the facade. Facade transparency requirements prohibit blank walls and encourage pedestrian activity.

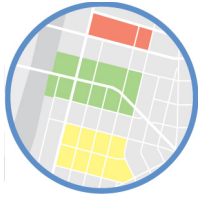
## Park-Once



A parking strategy that combines on-street parking spaces and shared parking lots to allow visitors to park their car once and walk comfortably to their destinations.

# CONCEPT DEFINITIONS

## Place Type



An area with distinct physical characteristics. Place-type names are a shorthand to describe places with a similar character. This guide identifies three place types for commercial corridors and four place types for shopping centers and business parks.

utilization periods that do not coincide, such as professional office and multi-family residential. Combining parking typically reduces the number of spaces between 20 and 60%, resulting in fewer and smaller parking lots and more activities and buildings.

## Public Realm Standards



The public realm is the area between building facades, including front yards, sidewalks, and streets. Standards for the public realm include standards for public property, including streets and sidewalks, along with matching standards for private property such as build-to-zones and facade transparency minimums.

## Street Enclosure



A sense of enclosure created when a street is lined with building facades and street trees, making a street feel like an “outdoor room.”

## Shared Parking



Parking that is shared between two or more independent uses. When parking is provided individually for each separate use, many parking spaces are underutilized. Parking can be combined between adjacent or nearby uses, especially when they have peak

## Walkability



A positive characteristic when streets encourage people to walk. The most walkable streets are spatially enclosed (by building facades and street trees), are connected in multiple directions, and are safe, interesting, and memorable.



Mall retrofitted with green infrastructure in Maplewood MN, image credit: CNU



This section includes descriptions and examples of each Place Type used in this Guide, an overview of each topical area of change, and a discussion of complicating factors specific to commercial corridors and shopping centers. Recommendations are organized by Place Type and Area of Change, for which this section provides background.

## Corridors

### PRE-1950s SHOPPING CORRIDORS

**A shopping and mixed-use street with buildings near the sidewalk.** *These shopping corridors are part of a connected street grid that accommodates walking, shared or on-street parking, and public transit. Many of these corridors were neighborhood Main Streets or former streetcar corridors. They are found in cities and villages throughout Michigan and sometimes road widening and the consequent loss of on-street parking has further degraded their walkability and vitality.*

*Corridors of this type may be repaired using the Main Street District from **Enabling Better Places: Users' Guide to Zoning Reform**. While they may not feel like Main Streets today, the form and goals are similar. This includes small neighborhood retail streets.*



- **Downtown Allen Park:** An extremely wide local 3-lane plus parking corridor that serves as the main street of Allen Park, lined by a mix of uses in small and mostly pedestrian-scaled buildings (see photo, left). The primary drawback to the corridor is the un-enclosed streetscape, due to the distance from building face to building face, currently taken up by diagonal on-street parking.

*Image credit: City of Allen Park*



- **Utica Junction, Roseville:** Intersection of a local historic 2-lane corridor with a 4+ lane divided state highway commercial corridor at the center of downtown Roseville. The city has also completed a 4-to-3 lane road diet, adding on-street parking, and additional pedestrian crossings on Utica. **Partnering with MEDC, the city is offering free land on the local corridor, Utica Road, in exchange for agreements to develop mixed-use on the property.**

*Image credit: Peter Allen & Associates*



- **Burton Street, Wyoming:** A 4-lane local historic corridor lined by a mix of uses and a variety of building types. The corridor connects a major employment center of the city with Highway 131 and is therefore an important transportation route, while also serving as a commercial center for surrounding neighborhoods.

*Image credit: City of Wyoming*



- **Saginaw/Ashman district in Midland:** A 5-lane historic corridor which currently bisects an elegant town center circle, lined with small and mostly pedestrian-scaled buildings in the Center City area of Midland. **The city has recently sought consultant input into potential street redesign and redevelopment opportunities in the area.**

*Image credit: City of Midland*

# PLACE TYPES

## CONTEMPORARY CORRIDORS

A mixed-use area that may include shopping, offices, and apartment complexes. Buildings are typically standalone, single-use on separate parcels. Each has its own surface parking lot, but may also include multifamily buildings and small strip centers with shared parking. Each parcel commonly has one or more curb cuts to provide vehicular access from the corridor. These areas may have sidewalks and landscaping and are often buffered from adjacent neighborhoods. The corridor may be continuous or intermittent, the latter including a small collection of commercial parcels at intersections.



- **Washtenaw Avenue, Ann Arbor/Ypsilanti:** A currently character-lacking 5-lane state owned corridor serving as the primary transportation connection between Ann Arbor, Pittsfield Township, and Ypsilanti. The corridor is a subject of the [Reimagine Washtenaw](#) planning process (see rendering, left) which seeks to transform the corridor into a pedestrian-friendly, multi-modal boulevard that will better support the walkable, mixed-use urbanism that the community seeks.

*Image credit: SmithGroup*

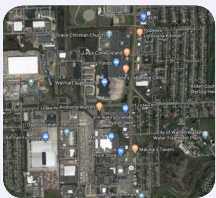


- **Ford Road, Westland:** A currently uninviting 5-lane state owned corridor that is a key thoroughfare for the larger metro-Detroit area lined by a mix of uses in a variety of parcel shapes and sizes. The City of Westland is seeking to leverage its [Reimagine Ford Road](#) initiative (see new public space, left) as a catalyst for redevelopment of a walkable mixed-use neighborhood center.

*Image credit: Westland DDA*

## HIGHWAY CORRIDORS

A commercial corridor along an arterial road with standalone buildings on acre-plus parcels. These parcels generally have individual driveways to the arterial, room for ample off-street parking, and a common drainage system. These corridors are predominantly retail- and restaurant-oriented, catering to national and regional brands. Highway corridors are continuous for distances of one mile and longer, interrupted by shopping centers, business parks, and large employers.



- **Van Dyke Avenue, Warren/Sterling Heights:** A varying width (as much as 8-lane in some locations) state commercial highway corridor running through Warren and Sterling Heights, serving as a main commercial spine for the Detroit suburbs. The stretch of corridor also has examples of every shopping center type described in this Guide.

*Image credit: Google Maps*



- **Ford Road, Canton:** A 5-lane state commercial highway corridor that effectively serves as the commercial center of Canton. [In 2018, residents approved a ballot measure to fund over \\$5.5 million a year for 20 years for road maintenance and repair.](#) MDOT began a design process to retrofit the highway into a boulevard, a process that will take years to complete.

*Image credit: Canton Township*



- **Columbia Avenue, Battle Creek:** A 5-lane state commercial highway corridor intersecting Main Street and with an exchange with Interstate 94, the corridor is lined with single-use, highway-based fast food and convenience retail pad sites.

*Image credit: Commercial Exchange*

## Shopping Centers and Business Parks

### NEIGHBORHOOD CENTERS

Typically found along arterial corridors, neighborhood centers are 10 acres or larger, most often with a grocery store or other anchor. Neighborhood centers may include one or more commercial outparcels along the arterial with parking lots between the larger commercial strip and the arterial. Neighborhood centers can accommodate more substantial redevelopment than surrounding corridor properties.



- **Seminole Road and Henry Street, Norton Shores:** A series of auto-dependent sites along two contemporary commercial corridors that together create a neighborhood center. The City has developed a concept plan (see rendering, left) to retrofit the adjacent commercial properties by reintroducing a street network, providing a mix of uses, and improving walkability.

*Image credit: Beckett & Raeder, Inc.*



- **Gault Village Shopping Center, Ypsilanti Township:** A blighted commercial center mired in legal battles and ownership contention, Gault Village is the epitome of the outdated arterial shopping center. The Township has developed a concept plan for a less auto-focused mixed-use retrofit of the property and is attempting to work with ownership to implement changes.

*Image credit: Google Maps*



- **Westborn Mall / Dearborn Plaza, Dearborn:** Two adjacent auto-centric neighborhood commercial centers to either side of the major regional arterial of Michigan Avenue that constitutes “downtown” Dearborn, both centers have big-box and smaller retail and service users set back from the roadway behind expansive surface parking fields.

*Image credit: Stokas Bieri Real Estate*

### POWER CENTERS

Often found along major arterial corridors, power centers are 20 acres or larger, with multiple big box anchors, often arranged in a long row or U-shape. Power centers usually include commercial outparcels along the arterial with substantial parking lots, either centralized or along the commercial strip. They include varying degrees of internal circulation, depending upon their size, from smaller access lanes to circulation roads which include additional small commercial strips.



- **Frandor Shopping Center, Lansing:** A 450,000 square foot big box retail center with 6 anchors and 60 additional retail stores and services adjacent to U.S. Highway 127. The shopping center opened in 1954, and has been adapted over time to its current configuration, but maintains an extremely auto-centric land plan with large parking fields and little to no walkability.

*Image via Wikipedia*

# PLACE TYPES

## POWER CENTERS (cont.)



- **Arborland Center, Ann Arbor:** An over-400,000 square foot big box retail center with 7 anchors and 26 additional retail stores and services adjacent to U.S. Highway 23. The shopping center opened in 1961 and was razed and redeveloped in 1999, but today it remains a cluster of big box retail outlets surrounding large expanses of parking (see photo, left).

*Image credit: Brixmor*



- **Green Oak Village Place, Brighton:** A 550,000 square foot big box retail center with 6 anchors and 70+ additional retail stores and services adjacent to U.S. Highway 23 that opened in 2006. The center shows an attempt at a block structure, with a central roundabout and boulevard spine, but only has restaurant and commercial uses and is extremely auto-oriented and unwalkable.

*Image credit: Redico*



- **Village of Rochester Hills, Rochester Hills:** A 375,000 square foot upscale retail lifestyle center with 2 anchors and 50+ additional retail stores and services adjacent to U.S. Highway 23 that opened in 2002 to replace a former shopping mall. The lifestyle center land plan is arranged with a “Main Street” central traffic-calmed spine, but otherwise the center is auto-dependent.

*Image credit: Crains Detroit*

## BUSINESS PARKS

**Single- or limited-use developments frequently built by a master developer.** Business parks are typically 10-50 acres in area and are often well-landscaped with large buffers around parking fields and single-use office buildings. These areas are sometimes supported with small strip centers for compatible retail and food service. Research parks and civic centers may be considered part of this category. Industrial parks may also exhibit these characteristics.



- **Civic Center, Warren:** The existing Civic Campus, originally planned in the 1960s and adjacent to the GM Technical Center, has expanses of surface parking and a placeless character. The city wants a new downtown and has developed the [Warren Town Center Master Plan](#) (see rendering, left) proposing redevelopment to increase vitality, walkability, and diversity of uses in the area.

*Image credit: Gibbs Planning Group*



- **Town Center, Troy:** The existing campus of civic institutions in Troy follow a suburban land use pattern with meandering parking lots, wide setbacks, and landscaped buffers. Seeking to create a new downtown, the city has proposed [Troy Town Center](#) (see rendering, left), a retrofit that would add a street grid, additional uses, and a variety of public spaces and amenities.

*Image credit: Gibbs Planning Group*



- **Plymouth Green Research Park, Ann Arbor:** A 60,000 square foot office park sits adjacent to U.S. Highway 23. The park is surrounded by out-parcels of multifamily housing, institutional, and retail uses yet is extremely isolated without viable pedestrian connections to nearby uses.

*Image credit: The Hooberman Companies*

## Malls

**Large enclosed shopping centers with two or more integrated department stores, fashion apparel stores, general merchandise, mini-anchors, cineplexes or other large-scale entertainment attractions, and food-and- beverage service clusters.** The regional mall is usually 40+ acres including large parking fields on the perimeter of the building. They often have a private ring road independent of adjacent municipal thoroughfares and commercial outparcels between the municipal and ring roads. Contemporary malls are frequently located with interstate or major arterial visibility.



- **Midland Mall, Midland:** An enclosed shopping mall opened in 1991 with over 500,000 square feet of retail floor area, the shopping center has space for 4 anchor tenants and 50+ additional stores and services. While 3 anchor tenants are currently empty, the mall manages to maintain a relatively low vacancy rate.

*Image credit: Midland Daily News*



- **Northland Center, Southfield:** A former enclosed shopping mall opened in 1954 and demolished in 2018, the site is now 125 acres of greyfield that the city has developed a masterplan for and is in the process of seeking redevelopment partners in order to implement.

*Image credit: Google Maps*



- **Eastland Center, Harper Woods:** An enclosed shopping mall opened in 1957 and expanded several times since, it currently has over 1.4 million square feet of retail floor area, with space for 6 anchor tenants and 74 additional stores and services. Though 4 anchors are currently vacant, the struggling mall was sold at auction in 2018 for \$3.125 million dollars.

*Image credit: Elaine Cromie*



*Project study area and proposed masterplan, Southfield, MI, image credit: Northland Subarea Redevelopment Plan*

# AREAS OF REFORM

Code reform can cover a broad range of topics. To narrow the scope, this Guide focuses on six key topics that have the most significant impact on the success of Michigan commercial corridors and shopping centers.

**Recommendations for each place type are organized into topics for ease of use.**



## Streetscape

Streetscape design includes the location and character of landscaping along with vehicular, pedestrian, green infrastructure, and bicycle facilities. A pedestrian-oriented public realm will need to be created to redevelop shopping centers and business parks. The streetscape directly affects the redevelopment of corridors, shopping centers, and business parks. Along corridors, the streetscape is generally publicly owned and maintained; shopping centers and business parks often have privately owned streets and drive aisles. Streetscapes that prioritize vehicular circulation are uncomfortable and unsafe for pedestrians and bicyclists; improvements should focus on traffic calming, on-street parking, access control, and pedestrian and cyclist comfort and safety.



## Form

Form regulations govern the location and size of buildings, including setbacks and height. Regulations that require suburban setbacks and buffer strips limit pedestrian and cyclist accessibility. Revisions should include reduced setbacks, increased lot coverage, and increased building height. Artificial density caps and floor-to-area ratios (FAR) can be replaced by specific form regulations. When carefully crafted, form regulations can transform the built pattern based on local goals.



## Frontage

Frontage regulations control the design of building facades and front yards of properties—which is the section of a property that faces the street or, in the case of existing suburban conditions, often the parking lot. Frontage quality attracts people and increases the vibrancy of an area. Buildings along corridors may face the street but are often set back behind parking lots, discouraging walking. In shopping centers and office parks, buildings tend to be oriented towards parking lots. In these situations, redevelopment requires new streets faced with new buildings.



## Use

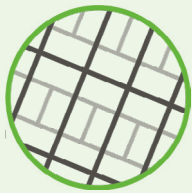
Use regulations limit what activities may take place in buildings, often forbidding more than a single use or any change of use over time. Commercial corridors, shopping centers, and business parks often restrict or forbid any kind of housing. Corridors often benefit from new housing that can break up overly long commercial strips. Shopping centers and business parks often benefit from office and civic uses as well as housing. Allowing a mix of uses can contribute to improving the vitality of the area, eliminating the auto-dependence of users and avoiding the destination condition of the development in favor of supporting a more diverse set of people able to enjoy the corridor or center.



## Parking

Inappropriate on-site parking regulations can have devastating effects on the future of corridors and shopping centers. The location of parking must be carefully controlled to encourage the success of a park-once-and-walk strategy. Auto-dependent environments may need more parking capacity than downtowns or historic neighborhood centers, requiring strategies like shared parking lots and/or the availability of on-street parking spaces.

**In addition to zoning codes, recommendations for reforming additional land use regulations are included.**



## PUD & Subdivision

The redevelopment of large properties such as shopping centers and malls will require subdivision into blocks and smaller lots. A healthy block structure is crucial to provide developable frontages and better access and circulation. As new streets are created, public amenities such as plazas and squares can be added.



*Newly constructed townhouses in Cincinnati OH, image credit: Torti Gallas + Partners*

# COMPLICATING FACTORS

## STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

Adding on-site stormwater management is a great opportunity to start transforming a pedestrian unfriendly place. Rain gardens, bioswales, trees, and other approaches that store, absorb, or evaporate precipitation can often be easily integrated into existing parking lots, streets, shopping centers, and other wide swaths of impervious cover. These approaches can also provide a number of additional community benefits, such as reducing costs for stormwater management, increasing pedestrian safety, and creating a more beautiful and distinctive neighborhood. Also, these approaches can help a municipality meet their stormwater requirements.

Additionally, there may be opportunities to leverage the more expansive spaces of a shopping center or corridor with a neighboring neighborhood or town center's more constrained spaces. Area-wide stormwater management approaches allow a space constrained site to meet a lesser stormwater requirement in return for integrating stormwater management practices elsewhere in the same sewershed. This approach reduces the burden on the developer while at the same time increasing overall stormwater management within the sewershed.

The most significant barriers to integrating green infrastructure approaches typically come from regulatory restrictions such as building codes and land use regulations such as setbacks or

public works requirements, rather than zoning codes. However, aligning all regulatory areas with implementation of green infrastructure should be prioritized in any planning efforts.

## UTILITY PLACEMENT

Corridors, shopping centers, and business parks are rarely designed with redevelopment in mind. Utilities often crisscross under parking lots and open spaces, which increases the cost of redevelopment and often makes incremental change infeasible. Along corridors in particular, utility easements outside of rights-of-way can inhibit the ability to make the corridor more walkable. The significance of these complications depends upon the scale of existing utilities as well as the willingness of utility companies and public works departments to accommodate redevelopment.

Regional utility corridors, such as high-voltage overhead transmission lines, can hinder development by dissuading people's presence in large unusable spaces. Areas with such corridors are not ideal for redevelopment and this should be considered when prioritizing redevelopment efforts.

## Incremental Step: Leverage Infrastructure Investments

To attract private investment and new development, local governments can make significant public investments, either by upgrading existing infrastructure or by investing in new infrastructure. Many cities and towns seize the opportunity to direct these investments to the neighborhoods they would like to revitalize. Research has shown that by leveraging public investments, communities can increase land value from 70 to 300 percent and can boost private investment, social capital, tourism, and retail activity by an average of 30 percent (Litman 2010). They can also achieve key "placemaking" goals, by communally shaping public spaces to heighten their shared value.

Norman, Oklahoma, about 25 miles south of Oklahoma City, is an interesting work in progress. The town had \$27 million to improve traffic flow and increase safety along a seven-block stretch of road that bisected a typical strip retail district with large parking lots on both sides of the street. The town came together to discuss how to use this money to make broader streetscape upgrades along with the necessary safety improvements. Business owners, university officials, and local leaders joined forces and engaged in strategic placemaking to discuss how they might create a walkable retail area.

Municipalities can also leverage capital improvement investments against other community goals. With shrinking resources, local governments can no longer reasonably afford to achieve single-objective outcomes from their infrastructure investments. For example, the city of Lenexa, Kansas (a suburb of Kansas City) determined to be a more sustainable and livable community, used green infrastructure projects to help achieve that goal. Tapping funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, city officials implemented a range of street-level stormwater improvements that achieved key placemaking objectives, such as creating open spaces and promoting walking, while addressing stormwater problems.



This section provides specific recommendations for taming, evolving, or transforming auto-oriented corridors, and for transforming declining shopping centers and business parks.

Corridor recommendations can be applied after evaluating the character and context of individual corridors and clearly identifying a community's goals for each. Shopping center and business park recommendations are broad in nature due to the complexity of such transformations.

A general rule for new regulations is to avoid excessive specificity. Recent codes adopted in some municipalities are overly complicated and too specific on some issues of lesser importance. Such codes can dissuade rather than encourage private sector investment by making compliance too expensive or too hard to predict. Examples include complex or subjective architectural requirements, a mandated mix of use categories, and overlapping regulations such as regulating both building type and frontage type on the same parcel.

## Incremental Step: Align Codes and Ordinances

As this document broadly presents, outdated codes and ordinances are among the greatest barriers to rescaling suburban environments. These land development regulations—from zoning ordinances to street standards, parking requirements, site coverage, and height limits—are often responsible for existing transportation and land use patterns and serve as the default legal structure for new development. The upshot is that building a walkable mixed-use neighborhood is often illegal, requiring the developer to seek variances or special permits, which can create uncertainty and delays in the development process or discourage redevelopment in the first place.

Research has found that government support for development in targeted areas is the strongest predictor of private investment (Hook et al. 2013). One of the easiest ways to support new growth is to change the codes and ordinances to legalize pedestrian-friendly development. New codes can be embedded in an overlay zone or a neighborhood plan to allow for the type of construction needed to transform an area.

For example, Columbia Pike in Arlington, Virginia—a 3.5-mile urban corridor across the Potomac River from downtown Washington, DC—was rescaled after the county modified the underlying development codes and ordinances. Located in an urban county that grew explosively in recent decades, Columbia Pike, by contrast, had seen little development and minimal investment in the past 30 years. In the late 1990s, county leaders created a form-based code to foster transit- and pedestrian-oriented infill redevelopment in the corridor. The code is an optional code (also known as a parallel code); all the underlying zoning remains in place, but incentives such as expedited review and approvals encourage its use. Since adopting the code in 2003, the Pike has seen more than 1,000 new housing units and 240,000 square feet of retail built and another 600 housing units and 21,700 square feet of retail have been approved.

# CORRIDORS

## Planning and Context

This guide identifies three distinct corridor place-types: pre-1950, contemporary, and highway. Local governments often apply the same zoning categories to all three types, despite differences such as the size and placement of buildings, the size of parcels, and the physical characteristics and location of the road itself. Buildings in pre-1950s shopping corridors, as opposed to those in contemporary corridors, vary in parcel size and configuration and address different modes of transportation. Additionally, buildings in both types of corridor may vary widely in age due to turnover of businesses and evolving standards. Yet while dimensions may vary, scale is often consistent, with large lots, large buildings, and expansive parking lots being common.

Just as the buildings in a corridor can vary, so too can the corridor itself. Some corridors are fairly narrow streets, with slower travel speeds and sidewalks on both sides, while others have multiple lanes with heavy traffic, high travel speeds, and inadequate or missing sidewalks. Achieving successful change along narrow, slower streets can often be achieved with little public sector investment, while larger, higher-speed roadways require significant investment.

Many commercial corridors have excellent opportunities to create greener streets by adding street trees, rain gardens, or other green approaches into the space between the road and sidewalk. As a first step toward taming an auto-dependent environment, some municipalities have converted a travel lane into a pedestrian/ bike lane with a parallel rain garden. However, standards often have to be modified to allow water next to curbs, allow trees in the right of ways, and simplify allowing green approaches.

Some corridors are fairly short and have a high market demand for retail or office uses, and often for upper-story residences as well, while others are part of a street grid so they are easily accessible to surrounding neighborhoods. Some pass through a community while others are located around the perimeter. Corridors may be major transportation routes, carrying thousands of vehicular trips a day, while others are primarily limited to local traffic.

**Most of these corridors would be improved by allowing, and adding, green infrastructure within the right-of-way and by identifying nodes of concentrated commercial or mixed-use activity. The land between the nodes are ideal locations for missing-middle housing, larger residential and office buildings, and auto-oriented retail uses.**

Transforming a corridor—for instance creating a new Main Street along a particular segment of the corridor—is a complex process. It starts with making the “tame” and “evolve” zoning changes described earlier, but then requires additional

commitments and investments from both the public and private sector. The first step is to identify potential segments for such a transformation. Main Street districts are typically viable up to  $\frac{1}{4}$  or even  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile. Beyond this length, the walkable retail environment degrades; other uses should predominate, such as housing, offices, or auto-oriented retail. A physical plan is required for the proposed main street segment.

Ideally, changes to the road should come ahead of or be concurrent with regulatory changes that affect private properties. Along high speed corridors without on-street parking, requiring buildings to be right at the sidewalk and accessible only from the sidewalk is impractical for businesses. Slowing traffic, reducing lanes, and adding on-street parking and street trees create the conditions that support pedestrian-oriented businesses. Leading with changes to the road signals to property owners and developers that the community is committed to the success of a walkable place.

Sometimes a corridor with a promising location for a Main Street is on a state or county road where the local government doesn't have planning authority—thus requiring a cooperative effort. Even on locally controlled roads, funding may not be available to reconfigure the road immediately. In these cases, road reconfiguration may not be able to lead change.

Where land-use changes must lead the process, an incremental or phased approach may be required. For instance, new buildings along roads without on-street parking may anticipate entry primarily from the rear in early years, yet be designed with functional entries and signage along the street to anticipate future conditions.



*Pedestrian-friendly fast food, image credit: Mary Madden*

## Streetscape

Simple changes to the zoning code and street design standards can help transform corridors from being primarily places for cars to being places for people. Some of the following recommendations require coordination with additional agencies and are more difficult to achieve on roads with state or county planning authority. Changes on locally controlled streets are a good first step.

### Stage 1: Tame

#### 1. Develop (context appropriate) public realm standards.



The quality of sidewalks, lighting, furnishing, and plants along corridors is critical to the success and vibrancy of walkable mixed-use areas. Districts should have a relatively consistent look and feel, supporting a comfortable pedestrian environment, but recognizing different scales, character, and context within a large area. Where standards are missing, each new development might miss the mark or create a character that detracts from a cohesive environment. Careful attention should be paid to creating a pleasant environment and avoiding excesses. Where missing, the addition of painted crosswalks and improved wayfinding signage can contribute to walkability while improving sense of place. Reformed standards can possibly include minimum sidewalk width, on-street parking, street-level stormwater management allowance, pedestrian signage encroachments, and permitting the use of the right-of-way for retail and outdoor dining, and streetscape elements—such as pedestrian-scaled lighting, planters, street trees, newspaper stands, trash receptacles, public art, and street furniture. In contemporary and highway corridors, where buildings may be a little further from sidewalks, additional pedestrian areas, landscaping, and other streetscape elements may be required within the setback areas.

#### 2. Permit encroachments into public rights-of-way.



Many pedestrian-oriented retail corridor businesses rely on awnings and signage that project into the public right-of-way and may use the sidewalk for outdoor seating. In some locations, encroachments have been disallowed or subject to an easily revocable permit. Depending on the corridor context and existing pedestrian realm, the ability to encroach and the guarantee of a reasonable license duration are important to the success of these businesses.

#### 3. Add on-street parking wherever possible.



On-street parking for cars and bicycles provides a layer of physical protection for pedestrians and strongly supports nearby businesses. Historically, on-street parking has often been removed to add travel lanes; but even when those travel lanes are no longer needed, on-street parking is rarely replaced. Wherever possible, on-street parking should be replaced or added along pre-1950s shopping corridors and newer corridors that will be evolving or transforming into more urban areas.

## Incremental Step: Get the Streets Right

A community's street network is fundamental to any redevelopment efforts. Typical suburbs have wide, high-speed travel lanes designed to move cars efficiently through the area. But the primary focus of any suburban rescaling effort should be on moving people, not cars, through an area. This goal can be accomplished by building wide, inviting sidewalks; installing lanes and parking for bicycles; creating buffer zones between people and moving traffic; installing rain gardens or bioswales in the buffer area; developing interesting places to walk; and making it safe to cross the road. Well-conceived streets can also kick-start the redevelopment process. However, in many suburban communities, which tend to be less competitive, the public sector may need to catalyze growth by making up-front investments with support for infrastructure and amenities to attract private-sector funds.

For example, Lancaster, California, a mid-size city about 60 miles north of Los Angeles, transformed a five-lane arterial into a Main Street by investing in a number of streetscape improvements. They narrowed and reduced travel lanes, and added on-street parking and street vegetation, which slowed traffic from 40 miles per hour to 15 miles per hour. The city's investment of \$11.5 million attracted more than \$300 million in private investment.

# CORRIDORS

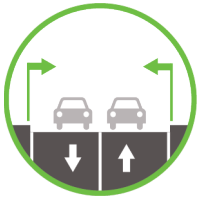
## Stage 2: Evolve

### 1. Stormwater management options.



A first step toward taming an auto-dependent environment, some municipalities have allowed and encouraged green infrastructure. Doing so often requires changes to public work and street design standards to allow green infrastructure and trees in the right-of-way. Additionally, one of the easiest ways to better manage stormwater is to reduce overall impervious surfaces, such as narrowing lanes and streets. One benefit to wide right-of-ways in some commercial corridors is the potential to transform that space into a public good. Additionally, to promote revitalization, off-site stormwater options should be made available within pre-1950s corridors. Where this is not a viable option, payment-in-lieu of providing stormwater management options may be offered.

### 2. Reduce travel lane width.



Pedestrian-oriented streets benefit from slow-moving vehicles. From a safety standpoint, slowing cars is critical to saving lives. From a business standpoint, slowing cars increases business visibility and makes the sidewalk a safer and more pleasant place for customers to walk. While posting a lower speed limit is important, driver speed is more directly influenced by the width and number of lanes. Travel lanes should be right-sized to 10 feet in business districts, with exceptions where bus routes require additional width.

### 3. Right-size the number of travel lanes.



For the same reasons discussed in item 2, the number of travel lanes should be right-sized. The most vibrant pedestrian-oriented retail corridors consist of 2 travel lanes moving in opposite directions, which is easily crossed by pedestrians. Vibrant districts may also survive 3-lane sections where a turn lane is necessary. Each additional travel lane reduces the potential success of a commercial corridor. While reducing lanes on contemporary and highway corridors may be politically difficult, most have more lane capacity than needed, today and into the future.

### 4. Implement complete streets policy.



A safe and comfortable walking and biking environment has the side benefit of producing more customers for adjoining businesses. Many communities have adopted complete street policies to support pedestrians and cyclists but have not followed through with meaningful implementation of those policies. This step is as important along corridors as the regulatory changes recommended above.



*Proposed retrofit of Harvey Street, Hudsonville MI, image credit: Sluiter Vanden Bosch and Associates*

## Form

Building form is critical to shaping quality outdoor spaces, including the “street room”. The fronts of buildings are the sides of the public realm, which includes streets and space between the street and buildings. Zoning codes often ignore the contribution buildings make to shaping public spaces. For instance, large setbacks weaken the quality of outdoor spaces. Zoning codes can be modified to recognize the importance of the physical form and placement of new buildings.

### Stage 1: Tame

#### 1. Remove or revise minimum lot size.



In the mid-20th century, many communities adopted suburban lot-size standards with little regard for existing land use patterns. This resulted in many lots becoming “non-conforming,” greatly limiting the rights of landowners to enlarge buildings and/or redevelop the site, an issue for pre-1950s

shopping corridors in particular. Zoning amendments to reduce or eliminate minimum lot sizes and legalizing non-conforming lots can help communities reduce obstacles to redevelopment.

#### 2. Eliminate buffer requirements.



Physical buffer strips, including berms or walls, are often required between different land uses. When required between businesses, they reduce walkability by forcing pedestrians to walk longer distances and limiting direct pedestrian connections. Buffers also defy spatial enclosure by separating buildings

from roads and from each other. An exception where buffers may be appropriate is a low hedge that screens the view of front parking lots from sidewalks and streets, or where they allow sideyard parking or access to parking behind buildings.

#### 3. Reduce minimum front and side setbacks.



Street enclosure can significantly impact the success of a corridor. This is particularly true for the pre-1950s or other limited width corridors. Yet many zoning codes require large front setbacks along these corridors, even though front setbacks are rarely justified, even for commercial buildings. Similarly, side

setbacks are often unnecessary along pre-1950's corridors in particular.

When reducing front setbacks along corridors, greater depth should be permitted along pre-1950s corridors. Adjusting build-to zones helps by emphasizing provision of landscaping, green infrastructure, pedestrian, bicycle, and streetscape elements within front setbacks to promote further activation.

### Stage 2: Evolve

#### 1. Eliminate excessive architectural requirements.



Many communities have adopted standards to create ‘architectural interest’ by requiring facade design standards, often with unsuccessful outcomes. Such requirements often include “4-sided architecture” and vertical or horizontal changes in facade (articulation), dimensioned building

elements, and prescriptive style requirements. The key to success in reviving or transforming an auto-oriented corridor lies mainly in the treatment of the ground floor. Architectural standards attempting to create ‘architectural interest’ are often costly to the developer with unsuccessful outcomes. Far more often, success can be found by addressing the number and orientation of building entryways, minimum transparency standards, the scale of signage, and ensuring residential buildings are street-oriented with small front yards, stoops, and porches.

#### 2. Remove intensity restrictions.



Per-property density or floor-to-area ratios (FAR) are poor tools for regulating corridor form. The bulk of buildings are better controlled directly, by regulating the building’s height, setback, and placement on the site. Building and fire codes already address life safety issues. Density and FAR

requirements are often set unreasonably low and with a limited product type in mind that may not fit today’s market demand.

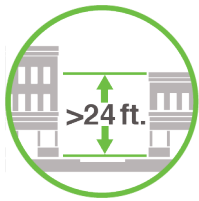


*Safeway in Washington DC, image credit: Torti Gallas + Partners*

# CORRIDORS

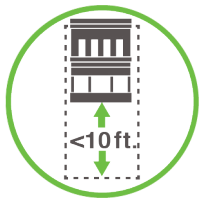
## Stage 2: Evolve (cont.)

### 3. Establish a minimum facade height.



Street enclosure can significantly impact the success and comfort of a corridor. This is particularly true for the pre-1950s shopping corridors and others of limited width. Comfortable streets feel like outdoor rooms, where the height of buildings is at least half the width of the street. Along sidewalks, ensure that building facades are no less than 24 feet high. A common misstep is to require a minimum number of stories, but this can cause development stagnation, particularly where there is no market demand for multistory buildings and limited experience with developing mixed-use buildings. A minimum facade height achieves the goals of enclosure and avoids an unnecessary pitfall.

### 4. Require a maximum front-yard setback (build-to range).



Buildings that are close to the street reduce the perceived width of the corridor. Communities can ensure buildings are constructed near the right-of-way by establishing a maximum front setback or a build-to range. While minimum setbacks sometimes allow developers to build an appropriate distance from a right-of-way, they don't require it. Therefore, maximum front-yard setbacks or build-to ranges are recommended. Build-to ranges ensure developers construct buildings an appropriate distance from the right-of-way, but also provide them the option of locating the building back to the maximum setback line—striking a balance between certainty and flexibility.

The size of a build-to zone, or maximum setback, will vary based on the character of the existing roadway and streetscape such as the number of travel lanes and vehicle trips/speeds, sidewalk width, and space for tree planting, green infrastructure, or other streetscape elements. Requiring buildings to be located close to the street is critical for pre-1930s corridors. While reducing minimum setbacks may be sufficient for evolution along contemporary and highway corridors, transforming these corridors will require a build-to range, which could provide space for additional pedestrian, bike, and landscape (streetscape) amenities within the front setback.

### 5. Require transition requirements to adjoining neighborhoods.



Where commercial and mixed-use areas abut single-family residential districts, adjacency requirements may be used to address compatibility issues. Despite the incompatibility of most buffers along corridors, transitions to residential districts in height, intensity, and setback may still be important. Adjacency requirements may include compatible height restrictions and side yard setbacks within 50 feet of residential districts.

### 6. Limit locations for drive-throughs.



Drive-through facilities promote an auto-oriented environment. They often require additional vehicular access points, reducing the active street frontage. When poorly located, they can detract from the pedestrian realm by deactivating the street edge, creating conflict points with pedestrians, and adding noise and air pollution to the sidewalk. Drive-throughs are most troublesome in pre-1950s shopping corridors where the pedestrian environment is the most critical. If drive-throughs are permitted in contemporary corridors, the location should be limited to the rear or non-street side of the property and prohibited between the building and the sidewalk. Drive-throughs are least troublesome in highway corridors, unless the ultimate goal is the corridor's transformation to a more urban and walkable condition, in which case the location should be limited.



*Pedestrian-friendly Kroger, Birmingham MI, image credit: Mary Madden*

## Use

Zoning's historic purpose has been to separate incompatible uses. Corridors are often limited to commercial uses, but they can accommodate a wider variety of uses including temporary uses on vacant land. To encourage full utilization of valuable corridors, landowners should be able to change uses in existing buildings without unnecessary regulatory barriers. Multi-family residential uses often fit into corridors; in targeted locations, mixed-use development may also be desirable.

### Stage 1: Tame

#### 1. Allow temporary activation.



An underutilized corridor can be activated by allowing temporary civic and business uses at select locations, up to two years with the option to renew. Temporary uses should not trigger permanent parking, landscape, or drainage requirements. Additionally, small non-permanent structures can be allowed to test business ideas, lowering the barrier to business success. These structures can be authorized for longer periods than other temporary uses.

#### 2. Simplify uses.



When businesses change product lines, tenants, or ownership, they should not be subject to new zoning requirements. Uses should be regulated by broad categories, such as commercial, office, lodging, residential, civic, institutional, and industrial—not by specific products or services such as coffee shop, ice cream parlor, or barber shop. Instead of attempting to list all permitted uses, specific uses that are problematic, such as big boxes, fuel sales, or drive-throughs, should be specifically restricted. A broad variety of activities ensures a vibrant environment.



*Pedestrian-friendly Trader Joe's, image credit: Mary Madden*

### Stage 2: Evolve

#### 1. Allow mixed-use development.



Strive for a mixed-use development pattern where complementary uses of land are located within walking distance. Mixed-use buildings, which combine more than one use within a single building, should also be permitted along corridors. Concerns of use separation and compatibility are addressed by building and fire codes. A common coding pitfall is to have overly-prescriptive regulations that require mixed-use buildings or specify the necessary mix of uses on a block or in a neighborhood. Individual buildings with a mix of uses may be desirable in certain prime locations but should not be required throughout a corridor.

#### 3. Permit multi-family.



Housing within walking distance of downtowns and Main Streets is vital to success, especially outside of peak hours. However, many commercial districts exclude residential housing, either in stand alone or mixed-use formats. Multi-family housing should be permitted throughout the district, with the exception of ground floor facades along the Main Street sidewalk. Note that downtown districts have Main Street corridors embedded within them—the primary shopping street—where ground floor residential may be restricted. Elsewhere within downtown, ground floor restriction should not be used.



*Atlantic Station, Atlanta GA, image credit: Jacoby Development*

# CORRIDORS

## Frontage

The single most important regulation in a city or village may be how the building meets the street. Issues listed below, like functional entry requirements and blank wall restrictions, should be at the top of the list for a corridor retrofit, as they are critical to commercial success while creating a more vibrant environment.

### Stage 1: Tame

#### 1. Require functional street facing entries.



Buildings that are located along sidewalks need functioning entries from the sidewalk. In recent years, buildings have sometimes been placed close to sidewalks but only accessed from rear parking areas. At a minimum, an entrance should always be required from a sidewalk; additional entrances may provide access from a parking lot. In pre-1950s shopping corridors, buildings that are wider than 100 feet can be required to provide additional entries, such as one for every 75 feet of building facade, along the sidewalk.

#### 2. Restrict blank walls.



Blank walls—expanses of wall without clear windows or doors—deaden the pedestrian experience. People are less likely to walk along blank walls and the sidewalks may become unsafe. While existing blank walls can be softened with murals, this strategy doesn't completely alleviate the problem. New blank walls, at the ground and second floor, should not exceed 30 feet in length along sidewalks.

#### 3. Require minimum transparency.



In a pedestrian-friendly retail corridor, buildings with very few windows and doors reduce vibrancy. Similar to blank walls, walking along these buildings is boring and can be dangerous. Pedestrians need to see inside buildings at the ground floor to keep their interest and feel safe. Along pre-1950s shopping corridors, ground floors should be at least 50% transparent, calculated across the full facade facing the sidewalk; heavily tinted glass is not transparent. Awnings can shade the glass while also protecting pedestrians from rain. If a contemporary corridor will be evolving toward more urban conditions, similar standards may also be applied. Unless a highway corridor is being completely transformed, through a road diet, creation/addition of slip lanes, etc., more lenient standards could be applied.

### Stage 2: Evolve

#### 1. Fill gaps between buildings.



Gaps between buildings reduce the vibrancy of pre-1950s shopping corridors, especially where parking lots or service/storage areas are exposed. Wide gaps discourage people from walking further. New buildings and building expansions should fill a minimum percentage of the lot's width along the sidewalk, typically 70% for the best pedestrian environments. In contemporary and highway corridors, this standard would not apply unless the corridor will be undergoing transformation.



*Pedestrian-friendly commercial frontage with rain gardens, image credit: Mary Madden*



## Parking

Frequently, parking requirements define urban design, land use density, and the experience of a place more than any other regulations. Furthermore, meeting parking requirements often decides the viability of a project because of the physical and financial demands of parking lots. Many zoning codes require excessive on-site parking, assuming all travel will be by private car, and ignore the observed reality that parking lots remain mostly empty for the majority of businesses, for the majority of days of the year. This condition often exists along highway corridors but is rare along pre-1950s shopping corridors, where the need for on-site parking is often lower or even nonexistent. Simple code fixes can make an enormous improvement in the viability of businesses along older corridors and adding or restoring on-street parking is the next step in their revitalization.

### Stage 1: Tame

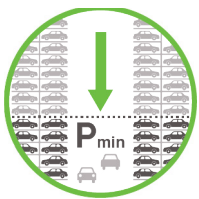
#### 1. Allow shared parking reductions.



Adjacent land uses should be allowed to enter into shared parking agreements and reductions in required parking should be considered in situations where peak parking times do not overlap. For example, multi-family housing and professional offices have very little overlap in peak parking demand

and the total number of parking spaces can be reduced when they share a parking lot. Similarly, lodging, restaurant, retail, governmental, and religious uses each have different patterns of demand. Shared parking promotes a park-once situation where customers are more likely to find new activities near their original destination and accomplish more with fewer trips.

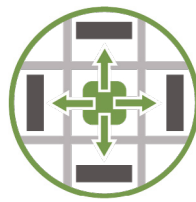
#### 2. Reduce required parking.



Most minimum parking requirements are copied from other communities and are not based on actual local parking demand. Except for enormously successful businesses, the parking required is usually greater than demand. Excess on-site parking is expensive to provide and increases the distance

between activities, discouraging a “park-once” environment. On small properties, it is often difficult or impossible to meet minimum parking requirements, precluding businesses from expanding their operations or changing uses and forcing many, especially food and beverage, to become frozen in time despite changing consumer preferences. To avoid this, minimum parking requirements should be lowered significantly.

#### 3. Add Green Infrastructure Approaches.



Adding on-site stormwater management in parking lots is a great way to tame large areas of pavement. Integrating rain gardens, bioswales, trees, and other approaches that store, absorb, or evaporate precipitation can often be easily incorporated into medians, edges, buffers, and other barriers separating

cars. Doing so often requires changes to public work and street design standards to allow green infrastructure to complement traditional grey approaches. Additionally, one of the easiest ways to better manage stormwater is to reduce overall impervious surfaces, such as reducing the amount of required parking.

#### 4. Maintain alleys/rear service access drives where they exist.



If alleys or rear service drives exist, they should not be vacated or abandoned. The best streets rely on many services being provided ‘out of sight,’ including utility lines, dumpsters, deliveries, and access to parking.

### Stage 2: Evolve

#### 1. Require shared access to reduce curb cuts.



Frequent curb cuts (access points to a road) are problematic for multiple reasons. They create unneeded space between buildings, interrupt traffic movement, and constitute conflict points that can be unsafe to pedestrians. In most cases, adjacent properties can share driveways, reducing the amount of curb cuts

needed. Similarly, neighboring parking lots can be required to interconnect, allowing customers to move between businesses without entering/exiting the public road.

# CORRIDORS

## Stage 2: Evolve (cont.)



### 2. Restrict parking location.

Parking lots that separate buildings from the street have become a common condition that decreases the vibrancy of many corridors and discourages pedestrian activity, even along pre-1950s shopping corridors that were designed for pedestrians. The absence of

buildings near the sidewalk erodes the sense of enclosure and makes the corridor feel wider than it is. Parking lots at corners exacerbate this problem for two streets. Parking lots should not be placed between the building and the street. If on-site parking is provided, it should be behind buildings or possibly to the side.

In contemporary and highway corridors, front parking lots may be the established pattern. If so, more incremental approaches may be necessary, such as requiring perimeter landscaping or low walls to visually screen the parking. However, for new

construction and major redevelopment, parking should be placed to the rear or side. If any parking spaces are permitted in front of buildings, they should be limited to a single bay of parking spaces; this is less critical for highway corridors unless the ultimate goal is the corridor's transformation to a walkable condition.

### 3. Eliminate minimum parking for small parcels.



As discussed in the 'tame' recommendations, the amount of parking required rarely reflects actual demand. Municipalities should focus more on where parking is located than on how much parking is required. To address this along pre-1950s corridors with shallow lots, minimum parking requirements should be eliminated entirely.

## Incremental Step: Get the Parking Right

Parking is a challenge for any development, but it's particularly tricky in suburban areas where the community is trying to pivot from auto-dependence to auto-independence. Conventional wisdom holds that parking is essential to retail survival; consequently, many suburban areas have an oversupply, owing to various code, design, or bank requirements. But any successful effort to rescale a suburb will require planners to balance today's parking needs with a creative vision for a less automobile-dependent future.

Communities can assess how much parking is needed and explore alternate ways to supply it by requiring on-street parking, permitting shared parking, or de-bundling parking spaces from housing units (EPA 2006). To foster a pedestrian-friendly streetscape, it's critical to eliminate or reduce surface parking, to place it behind retail areas, and to integrate as much functional landscaping for stormwater management as possible. Larger redevelopment projects may require a parking garage, but it should be located at the back of the site and not immediately adjacent to other transit opportunities. It's increasingly common to "wrap" a parking garage with smaller housing units or offices to provide parking without interrupting the pedestrian streetscape.

As a neighborhood decreases its dependence on cars, it can repurpose parking garages by converting top floors into community gardens or bottom floors into low-rent business incubator space. One community in Albany, New York transformed an old parking garage and car dealership into luxury condominiums.

By planning for future uses, a neighborhood can maintain the parking spaces it needs now while allowing the area to evolve and change without losing the initial investments made during the revitalization process. Local governments can also rewrite zoning and building codes to demand that garage developers meet the minimum adaptability requirements (Jaffe 2013).

# PUD AND SUBDIVISION STANDARDS

**Redevelopment of shopping centers and business parks may first require planning in order to guide zoning solutions. Existing subdivision and PUD standards may be inadequate to direct redevelopment. This section provides recommendations to modify PUD and subdivision standards for redevelopment.**

## Stage 1: Tame

### 1. Add Connectivity Requirements.

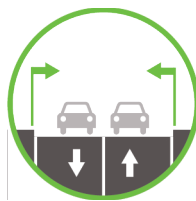


Increased connectivity is a key opportunity in the shopping center and business park redevelopment. These large properties can be redeveloped into multiple blocks to create new districts, neighborhoods, and downtowns. New streets can be achieved with public or private infrastructure, or be formed by redesigned access aisles. The resulting layout of the site should encourage cross-connectivity within the district and along its edges. Where possible, sites should be divided into blocks with a maximum length of 500 feet to support walkability. In all cases, an incremental approach should be supported, converting drive aisles and fire lanes into full streets.

- NC - Neighborhood centers have limited connectivity opportunity, usually supporting conversion of the internal drive aisles and fire lanes into a two-sided street. External connections to the adjacent street grid are limited and often not politically feasible. However, new pedestrian connections to surrounding neighborhoods should be encouraged.
- PC - Power centers typically support adding one or more internal blocks—but have limited external connectivity if existing structures are not removed. The amount of additional development that can be added is limited by parking capacity, often just the conversion of portions of the drive aisles and fire lanes or entry drive into a two-sided street. Where existing structures can be removed or altered, additional external connections can be added.
- BP - Business parks support significant connectivity improvement, often by upgrading internal circulation drives to streets and connecting adjacent parking lots. Because buildings are typically situated in fields of parking, set far back from existing streets, new streets, trails, and paths are easily added. Additionally, with buildings separated from each other, the overall business park can be retrofit into multiple, walkable blocks.

- MA - Malls occupy very large properties and are often surrounded by business parks and power centers. Mall redevelopment, incremental or full reconstruction, supports significant connectivity improvement. Connectivity improvements should consider both the creation of internal blocks within the mall site, as well as connections to surrounding shopping centers. Within the mall site, adding connections is dependent upon the scope of redevelopment. In either case, the site can be divided into walkable blocks.

### 2. Provide additional street types.



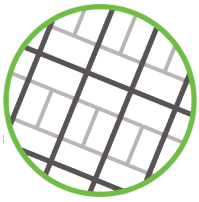
Most municipalities need at least two new street types for walkable mixed-use areas—one for the most commercial areas and another for the largely residential areas. Retail streets and neighborhood streets both benefit from slow moving vehicles. From a safety standpoint, the act of slowing cars is critical to saving lives. From a business standpoint, slowing cars increases business visibility and makes the sidewalk a safer and more pleasant place for customers to walk. While posting a lower speed limit is important, driver speed is more directly influenced by the width and number of lanes. Travel lanes should be right-sized to 10 feet for new development and, because most shopping center redevelopment areas utilize local streets, they only require two lanes.

The quality of sidewalks, lighting, furnishing, and street trees and other stormwater management elements along streets impacts the success and vibrancy of redevelopment areas. Standards should address minimum sidewalk width, on-street parking, streetscape elements—such as pedestrian-scaled lighting, planters, street trees, green stormwater approaches, newspaper stands, trash receptacles, public art, street furniture—pedestrian signage encroachments, and permitting the use of the right-of-way for retail and outdoor dining.

Street trees are critical to a walkable environment and should be required at 30 - 40 feet on center, depending on mature canopy size. Flexibility may be added for retail streets where trees may conflict with awnings or signs. Do not consider shrubbery/non-canopy trees as permitted street trees.

# PUD & SUBDIVISION STANDARDS

## 3. Restrict utility placement.



Development engineering doesn't typically anticipate future redevelopment of sites. As a result, utilities often crisscross parking fields and access ways. When redeveloping a shopping center or business park, existing utilities often restrict the placement of new buildings or require costly utility relocation.

Subdivision standards should be adjusted to require utilities be located within primary vehicle access rights-of-way and not within parking fields. Where utilities must be located within parking fields, they should be grouped in proximity to each other and located to allow future streets and buildings.

## 4. Require open space.



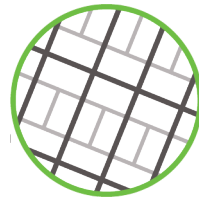
Shopping centers and business parks lack defined, usable open space. Redevelopment provides an opportunity to add public plazas, squares, and parks which may be integrated with new or existing stormwater facilities. Regulations should be added to encourage these types of open spaces in appropriate

locations. A common pitfall is requiring too much open space or spaces that are too large—emphasizing quantity over quality. Plazas and squares should be between  $\frac{1}{4}$  and 3 acres in area. Parks are larger, but requiring too much open space can reduce walkability and make redevelopment unfeasible by reducing the available redevelopment area. Open space requirements must be reasonable, typically not exceeding 10% of total land area.



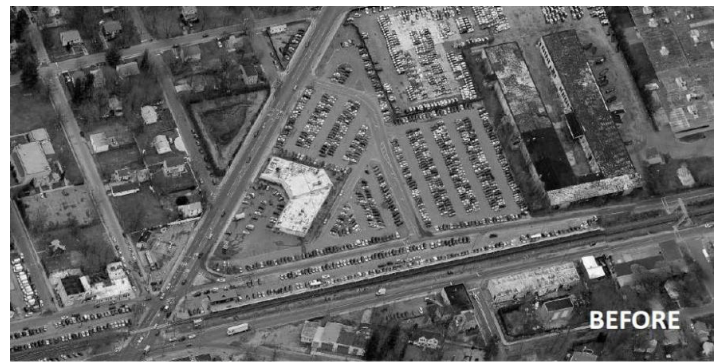
Santana Row, San Jose CA, image credit: Eric Fredericks via Flickr

## 5. Remove public utility easements.



Most recent subdivision standards and roadway standards include utility location requirements outside of the right-of-way. Walkable streets require buildings in close proximity to the sidewalk, which often conflicts with utility placement requirements.

To permit redevelopment, these standards must be modified. In most cases, all utilities can be provided safely within rights-of-way and private street easements. However, traditional downtown, Main Street, and neighborhood development typically includes alleys, which support additional utilities. Additionally, public utility easement requirements often assume that each street includes all utilities, which may not be the case. Universal requirements for utilities beyond the sidewalk (e.g. on private property) should be removed in favor of determining utility placement during redevelopment design.



Wyandanch, Long Island NY image credit: Torti Gallas & Partners

# ADDITIONAL REGULATIONS

## Modify Stormwater Regulations to Support Redevelopment

Understanding the way in which stormwater management design can support the development of walkable, vibrant places is a critical but often overlooked aspect of planning. This becomes particularly important when a municipality is seeking to transform aging shopping centers and corridors. As discussed throughout this document, adding well-designed street level stormwater management is a great opportunity to tame and evolve corridors and aging shopping centers.

All new development does not generate the same amount of runoff. For example, new large lot greenfield development creates significantly more stormwater runoff than redevelopment of an underutilized or abandoned parking lot. Michigan's current stormwater regulations acknowledge this by requiring stormwater management for the post-development volume of the runoff that is equal to or less than the volume of runoff from the existing site. This means underutilized parking lots and shopping centers would have minimum stormwater requirements when being redeveloped.

Additionally, municipalities can modify existing municipal stormwater requirements to enable certain types of new development to serve as a stormwater best management practice. Several states and local governments have adopted permit language that recognizes this dynamic and how some development, e.g., new development on already impervious cover, can serve to reduce overall runoff. After establishing a performance metric based on average annual rainfall that all new development and redevelopment must achieve, e.g., Michigan has a 1" requirement, the permit language offers reductions from certain types of development that have a demonstrated stormwater reduction.

Specific language is as follows:

*When considered at the watershed scale, certain types of development can either reduce existing impervious surfaces or at least create fewer 'accessory' (non-parking) impervious surfaces.*

- *Incentive standards may be applied to these types of projects.*
- *A reduction of 0.2 inches from the one inch runoff reduction standard may be applied to any of the following types of development:*
  - *Redevelopment*
  - *Brownfield redevelopment*
  - *High density (>7 units per acre)*
  - *Vertical Density, (Floor to Area Ratio (FAR) of 2 or >18 units per acre)*
  - *Mixed-use and Transit Oriented Development (within Y miles of transit)*
- *Reductions are additive up to a maximum reduction of 0.751 inches for a project that meets four or more criteria.*
- *The permittee may choose to be more restrictive and allow a reduction of less than 0.75 inches if they choose.*
- *In no case will the reduction be greater than 0.75 inches.*

Additionally, as managing stormwater can be more difficult (and expensive) in constrained spaces, e.g., higher density areas, this requirement could further incentivize developers to develop in greenfield areas, which may be less space constrained.



- Legend
- A Decorative Hardscape Pathways to Hammocks
  - B Hammock
  - C Tree Grove
  - D Bike Racks
  - E Decorative Fence



Nine Mile Road, Oak Park MI. image credit: OHM

# SHOPPING CENTERS AND BUSINESS PARKS

## Planning and Context

Shopping centers can usually be transformed to robust neighborhood centers since they are larger than 10 acres and have sufficient area to create new internal streets. Their size also affords a broader set of uses, including medium density housing like small apartment buildings and townhouses. The size of larger shopping centers like power centers and malls may provide the opportunity to create a complete downtown or new neighborhood. These larger areas exceed the scope of incremental code reform and require planning. Small improvements may be made, such as urbanizing the streets used to access larger shopping districts, but most areas over 10 acres will require a new plan. Subdivision standards come into play at this scale, and most existing subdivision and zoning requirements are inadequate to direct transformational redevelopment.

Redeveloping shopping centers is a significant undertaking. Where possible, the community should consider being a partner or owner in the development. This reduces the private sector burden and provides assurance of the community's active participation and support.

Many shopping centers are also located on corridors and communities may need to include strategies from the *Corridors* section of this Guide. Where this occurs, goals for the corridor may conflict with goals for the shopping center and require reconciliation, such as which street, the corridor or an internal street to the shopping center, a building should be oriented towards.

## Implementation Options:

- Shopping center redevelopment should be intentional and explicit due to the need for new infrastructure and improved connectivity. A simple change to a commercial zoning district jurisdiction-wide is not the best approach. A new zoning district or overlay zoning district should be developed and mapped to reflect the community's priorities for redevelopment. The new zoning or overlay district should also accommodate and not prohibit green infrastructure approaches in parking lots, buffers, streets, and sidewalk areas.
- Subdivision / PUD recommendations are provided to further direct redevelopment. Along with these, the Downtown District standards from *Enabling Better Places: Users' Guide to Zoning Reform* can be used to inform the regulations for the shopping center to be redeveloped.



Auto-oriented Target, image credit: CNU



Pedestrian-friendly Target, image credit: Mary Madden

# SHOPPING CENTERS AND BUSINESS PARKS

## Form

Buildings are critical elements in shaping outdoor spaces. Fronts of buildings are the sides of the public realm, which includes streets and space between the street and buildings. Shopping centers often have little to no public realm but can be retrofitted over time.

### Stage 1: Tame

#### 1. Line internal streets and drive aisles.



Internal circulation, fire lanes, and drive aisles are the low-hanging fruit in shopping center and business park redevelopment. Underutilized parking lots allow new buildings to be built along the edge of these vehicular ways, which can be redesigned as full streets, with the addition of sidewalks,

trees, rain gardens, or other green infrastructure approaches, and parallel or angled parking. This typically requires enlarging the space but is easily accommodated by the large parking lots. Two-sided streets are the desired result.

#### 2. Require minimum height.



Frequently, communities develop minimum story requirements in an attempt to revitalize portions of their jurisdiction but this can cause development stagnation. A minimum facade height achieves the goals of street enclosure and avoids the economic pitfall of minimum story requirements. Along sidewalks, ensure building facades are no less than 24 feet high.

#### 3. Remove buffer requirements.



Buffers required between different uses reduce walkability by separating businesses. The proximity of buildings and businesses creates vibrancy and pedestrian comfort. Buffers, particularly vegetative buffers, are incompatible with taming auto-oriented corridors and transforming them into pedestrian-oriented main streets. Uses and street-oriented buildings should not be required to be buffered from each other in these areas, nor separated from the sidewalk.



Typical shopping mall parking field, image credit: Mary Madden

### Stage 2: Evolve

#### 1. Line the site edge.



Shopping center parking lots have ample opportunity for intensification if setbacks permit it. Reduce setbacks to a small range, i.e. two to twelve feet. Maximum setbacks should be included to assure new buildings are located close to the street.

**Exception:** The size of a maximum setback will vary based on the character of the existing roadway and streetscape—number of travel lanes and vehicle trips/speeds, sidewalk width, and space for tree planting or other streetscape elements. Requiring buildings to be located close to the street is critical for pre-1950s corridors. While reducing minimum setbacks may be sufficient for evolution along contemporary and highway corridors, transforming these corridors will require a build-to range, which could provide space for additional pedestrian, bike, and landscape (streetscape) amenities within the front setback.

#### 2. Remove intensity restrictions.



Per-property density or floor area ratio restrictions are not the best tool for redevelopment areas where increased activity and vibrancy are goals. Height and setback requirements address issues of building bulk. The building code and fire code address issues of life safety. Parking and open space requirements further restrict development intensity. Density and Floor Area Ratio (FAR) requirements artificially limit the business and housing market as they are often set unreasonably low and with a limited product type in mind that may not fit market demand. Some jurisdictions may need to control density if there are infrastructure limitations such as water or sewer capacity.

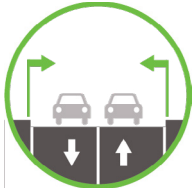


Mashpee Commons, Mashpee MA, image credit: June Williamson

# SHOPPING CENTERS AND BUSINESS PARKS

## Stage 2: Evolve (cont.)

### 3. Address edge transitions.



Many shopping centers share an edge with single-family subdivisions. Where this occurs, concerns will arise regarding connectivity, compatibility, and privacy. Transitions to single-family areas should be based upon distance to the edge, and height within a certain distance, typically 50 feet, should

be within one story of the permitted height of the adjacent residential zone.

### 4. Provide neighborhood connections where applicable.



When shopping centers share an edge with single-family subdivisions, pedestrian connections should be provided where possible. Vehicular connectivity is desirable, but frequently impossible. It is much more feasible to provide pedestrian paths to adjacent neighborhoods.

## Incremental Step: Change Land Use

Many suburban areas are littered with abandoned or underperforming big box stores and outdated shopping centers. By reusing these buildings as libraries, schools, housing, and even churches, communities can activate a dead zone and create demand for a location. They can also prevent or slow an expanding sprawl pattern by reducing the need to build new big box stores on undeveloped parcels. Without a broader redevelopment strategy, however, reuse of big box stores will not change the physical landscape to support significant pedestrian activity.

Suburban developers often have to assemble land parcels and navigate the demands of multiple landowners, especially in retail corridors with multiple strip malls and single-use retail outlets. As a result, many developers are attracted to old mall sites, which often have significant acreage, single owners, existing roads, water and sewer service, and adjacent residential housing. The existing mega-structure may be torn down and replaced with moderate-density buildings, a traditional street grid, and a mix of commercial and residential uses.

The process of shifting from a suburban landscape to a walkable, thriving neighborhood takes time and may require public infrastructure investments. Recognizing this, some municipalities plan to roll out several stages of redevelopment over decades and provide immediate funds for infrastructure in order to leverage future investments. A critical component for successful staged developments is compatible local government planning and zoning. Long-term agreements or planned densification can be designed to require density increases or large-scale redevelopment activities within a particular time frame, allowing market supply and demand to coevolve.

One example of successful staged development is Potomac Yards in Alexandria, Virginia. The former industrial site was remediated in 1997 and developed according to then-current zoning as a traditional strip mall. Tenants signed a 15-year lease, which was typical for the time and the space. Over the next several years, city officials obtained funding to open a new metro station in the back of the mall and several adjacent mixed-use, high-density residential developments were built. Land value in Potomac Yards rose significantly as a result. In 2010, city council approved a redevelopment plan which began in 2017 and will dovetail with the opening of the metro stop. The strip mall will be torn down to make way for a new walkable mixed-use neighborhood with 7.5 million square feet of office, retail, and residential development.



# SHOPPING CENTERS AND BUSINESS PARKS

## Use

Zoning's historic purpose has been to separate incompatible uses. Shopping centers are often limited to commercial uses, but they can accommodate a wider variety of uses. Owners should be able to change uses in existing buildings without unnecessary regulatory barriers. Multi-family residential and mixed-use development are often desirable additions.

### Stage 1: Tame

#### 1. Permit mixed-use.



Shopping districts and business parks need a mix of uses to create vibrancy and remain flexible to market conditions. However, providing that mix within the same property or building is often restricted by zoning. The building code addresses issues of use separation and compatibility; additional regulations concerning the mix of uses are not necessary, and can stifle development when the market shifts.

Ground floor commercial requirements are another common pitfall when establishing mixed-use districts. Non-residential ground floor uses may be required along the primary retail corridor, typically no longer than 1/4 mile, but should not be required throughout the district. In the greater district, permitting residential as a single-use should be allowed, which provides population support for area business.

#### 2. Broaden allowable uses.



Shopping centers and business parks are often limited to a narrow range of allowable uses. Whether by zoning or development agreement, the restricted set of uses limits long-term viability. Vibrant districts require housing, offices, retail, and civic uses to support daytime and nighttime activity.

#### 3. Allow Temporary Activation.



An underutilized corridor can be activated by allowing temporary civic and business uses at select locations, up to two years with the option to renew. Temporary uses should not trigger permanent parking, landscape, or drainage requirements. Additionally, small non-permanent structures can be allowed to test business ideas, lowering the barrier to business success; these structures can be authorized for longer periods than other temporary uses.

### Stage 2: Evolve

#### 1. Simplify uses.



Vibrant districts require a very broad collection of uses to support a pedestrian environment. These uses change frequently over time. When businesses change tenants or ownership, they should not be subject to new zoning requirements. Ideally, uses are regulated by broad categories, such as commercial, office, lodging, residential, civic, institutional, and industrial—not by specific products or services such as coffee shop, ice cream parlor, or barber shop. Specific uses that need to be restricted, such as big boxes stores, fuel sales, and drive-throughs, should be specifically disallowed or restricted, instead of attempting to list all permitted uses.

#### 2. Permit multi-family and townhouses.



Having housing within walking distance of mixed-use districts is vital to the district's success, particularly because these residents can help support businesses outside of their peak operating hours. However, many shopping centers and business parks are restricted from residential development under current zoning whether in standalone or mixed-use formats. Multi-family housing and townhouses should be permitted throughout the district, with the exception of ground floor spaces that face the primary retail corridor. Housing could be located on the ground floor if located in the side or rear of a building. Note that redeveloped shopping centers and business parks should have primary retail corridors designated within them—limited distance (walkable) shopping streets—where ground floor residential may be restricted. Elsewhere within the district, a ground floor restriction should not be used.

# SHOPPING CENTERS AND BUSINESS PARKS

## Frontage

The single most important regulation in an urban environment may be how buildings meet the street. Most shopping centers are not regulated in this way, but functional entry requirements and blank wall restrictions can be added. Some shopping centers can improve their chances of survival by creating a more vibrant environment for their customers.

### Stage 1: Tame

#### 1. Require clear glass



Buildings with very few windows and doors reduce vibrancy. Walking along these buildings is boring and can be dangerous if there are very few openings. Require a minimum 50% ground floor facade transparency (clear glass windows and doors at the street level measured between the bulkhead—about two feet above grade—and the sign band—about 10 feet above grade) within the primary retail street. This percentage is calculated across the full building facade facing onto the sidewalk. In addition to percentages of transparency, mirrored and heavily tinted glass should be prohibited at the ground floor. Pedestrians need to see inside buildings at the ground floor to keep their interest and feel safe. Tinted and fake windows, and displays with walls behind are not sufficient. Where shading is a concern, awnings or galleries can be used to shade the glass while also protecting pedestrians from the elements.

#### 2. Require doors at a minimum frequency.



Buildings that are located along sidewalks must have functioning entries from sidewalks. While this seems obvious, often buildings are built close to sidewalks but are only accessed from parking areas. Businesses and property managers pay the most attention to areas around entries. When there are no entries from the sidewalk, maintenance suffers. To achieve sidewalk-adjacent entries, require that at a minimum, the main building entry is from a public sidewalk. Entries from parking may be provided as secondary entries. Buildings that are greater than 100 feet wide may be required to provide additional entries, such as one for every 70 feet of building facade along the sidewalk.

#### 3. Require corner buildout.



When parcels are on the corner of two streets, buildings should be located on the corner to improve the vibrancy of both streets. Frequently retailers want to locate the parking on the corner, but it should always be located behind the building or on the side away from the corner. Require a building fronting the street for at least 70% of the primary street and at least 40 feet along the secondary street.

#### 4. Restrict drive-through locations.



Drive-throughs may continue to occur in redeveloping centers as long as they do not diminish the walkability of the area. This can be assured by requiring they are located behind the building and that no queuing lanes occur between the building and the sidewalk.

### Stage 2: Evolve

#### 1. Require minimum frontage occupation on primary streets.



Missing teeth, or gaps in a continuous line of buildings along a sidewalk, reduce vibrancy in a redeveloping area. As with issues of facade transparency and blank walls, gaps between buildings where parking, service, or storage areas are exposed are uninteresting to pedestrians. If the gap is large enough, it will encourage people to turn around. To address this issue, require that new buildings and existing building additions along the primary center street fill a minimum percentage of the lot width along the sidewalk, typically 70%.

# SHOPPING CENTERS AND BUSINESS PARKS

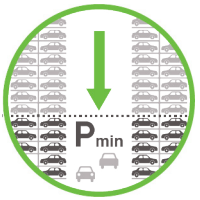
## Parking

Many zoning codes require excessive on-site parking, assuming all travel will be by private car. Shopping centers provide parking lots that are intrinsically shared-use, yet are often over-sized even during peak conditions. Shopping center owners understand the importance of sufficient parking to their tenants and rarely need the prodding of local government to provide enough parking. Minimum parking requirements can stymie the evolution of shopping centers, especially when the current requirements are higher than what has actually been provided for an older shopping center.

### Stage 2: Evolve

#### 1. Reduce required parking.

Most minimum parking requirements are determined politically rather than through study of actual need. In nearly every example, the supply of parking currently available is greater than the demand for parking. This mismatch is particularly important where redevelopment is being incentivized, as parking is a costly investment and underutilizes public infrastructure. To alleviate this condition, reduce minimum required parking ratios within targeted redevelopment centers.



#### 2. Enable shared parking reductions.

Where eliminating minimum parking is not feasible, multiple users should be allowed to share spaces to protect against excessive parking. Shared parking has been tested in numerous developments and further studied by the Urban Land Institute (ULI) who recommends that shared parking reductions be determined by analyzing the overlapping usage patterns for different business types. For example, multi-family housing and professional offices have very little overlap in peak parking demand and the total number of parking spaces can be reduced when they share a parking lot. Similarly, lodging, restaurant, retail, governmental, and religious uses have different patterns of demand. To address this issue, adopt the ULI's shared parking model and permit parking reductions where lots are shared between multiple users. Shared parking promotes a park-once situation where customers are more likely to find new activities near their original destination and accomplish more with fewer trips.



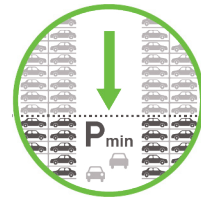
#### 3. Restrict parking location.

In redeveloping shopping centers, parking should be primarily located behind buildings and structures or on-street. When parking lots are located between buildings and the sidewalk, it is unpleasant to walk along the sidewalk. Curb cuts interrupt the



sidewalk, trees are reduced, and there is the added danger of vehicles pulling in and out. To address this condition, require that off-street parking be located behind buildings relative to the sidewalk. In limited locations along side streets, it may be acceptable to locate parking adjacent to the sidewalk, if it is not at a block corner and is accessed via driveway. Require perimeter landscaping or architectural treatment where parking exists between the building and the sidewalk.

#### Alt 1. Reduce minimum parking requirements.



Most minimum parking requirements are determined politically rather than through study of actual need. In nearly every example, the supply of parking currently available is greater than the demand for parking. Mismatch is particularly important where buildings are older and properties are small. Single family housing on larger lots are not affected by this but smaller lot single family, townhouses, and multi-family are impacted. To address this within adjacent neighborhoods, reduce minimum parking for all housing. Ideally, the minimum parking is reduced to 1 off-street space per unit. On-street parking provides visitor spaces and additional parking for the unit if needed. The curb space provides at least 2 parking spaces for single family detached housing and 1 parking space for townhouses.

#### Alt 2. Eliminate minimum parking.



In recent years, municipalities have begun to accept that parking minimums have not been an effective tool, neither in accurately predicting parking need nor in successfully producing great places. In most cases, lenders and tenants will demand a minimum number of parking spaces. Municipalities should be focused on where that parking is located, not how much parking there is. To address this, within in-town neighborhoods, eliminate minimum parking requirements.

# SHOPPING CENTERS AND BUSINESS PARKS

## Incremental Step: Add More Green

Suburban landscapes have been described as “hostile” and “unhealthy” because of their wide, underutilized zones dominated by hard surfaces. But many communities are bringing nature back into these built environments and transforming the streets and alleys between buildings into attractive, thriving pedestrian hubs.

Trees, plants, open green space, and recreational pathways afford a respite for individuals, provide social gathering areas, improve environmental conditions, and create more livable streetscapes (Benfield 2014). These approaches reduce stormwater runoff while simultaneously reducing the burden and demand on existing infrastructure while also bringing aspects of the natural environment into inhabited space. Trees provide shade, act as windbreaks and noise barriers, and improve air quality. In many instances, green infrastructure has been found to be less costly than or cost competitive with traditional infrastructure.

Suburban sites can make it easier to integrate green into a new development project because they often offer more land and flexibility than urban areas. As a public investment, green space can also serve to attract private development initiatives. Green spaces can be incorporated at three scales—at the regional, neighborhood, and site level. At the site scale, municipalities are beginning to use green infrastructure to manage stormwater by absorbing it into the ground or capturing it for later reuse. These strategies create more beautiful places, increase pedestrian safety, calm traffic, manage water flows, and develop a constituency to support effective stormwater management. (Much like potholes, a conspicuous clogged bio-swale on a local street is more likely to generate calls to city hall than an invisible underground pipe leak would.) These site-level approaches can also build momentum for larger-scale suburban transformation while creating bustling public spaces from parking lots, alleys, buildings, landscaped areas, rooftops, or streets. Imagine, for example, a sea of cascading greenery descending from the roof of a parking garage or a pedestrian plaza with planters, trees, tables, and chairs in a section of a former parking lot.

At the regional and neighborhood level, green space can connect natural areas and working lands while also providing critical ecological functions. Additionally, these connections can support multi-use paths and trails, habitat corridors, and other “green fingers” integrated throughout the region. Regional approaches focus on the movement of wildlife, people, and natural resources, such as water. Neighborhood strategies target connections to larger regional networks, creating connected public gathering places, open spaces, coordinated multi-use paths, and a bike infrastructure network.

The redevelopment of Stapleton Airport outside Denver, Colorado incorporated green space at the regional and neighborhood level. Approximately one-third of its 4,700 acres serve as new parks and open space for the project’s 12,000 residential units. Every home is within a 10-minute walk of open space. The centerpieces are the 80-acre Central Park and 85-acre Westerly Creek corridor. More than 27,000 trees have been planted and the 6 million tons of concrete that once formed the airport’s runways have been incorporated into the newly created parklands. Not only did the redevelopment rescale the airport into a thriving pedestrian place, it is also generating \$22 million in annual property taxes and \$13 million in sales tax revenue (Swetlik 2013).

### 4. Green Infrastructure Approaches



Adding on-site stormwater management into shopping center parking lots is a great way to tame large areas of pavement. Integrating rain gardens, bioswales, trees, and other approaches that store, absorb, or evaporate precipitation can often be easily incorporated into medians, edges,

buffers, and other barriers separating cars. Doing so often requires changes to public work and street design standards to allow green infrastructure to complement traditional grey approaches. Additionally, one of the easiest ways to better manage stormwater is to reduce overall impervious surfaces, such as reducing the amount of required parking.



*Belmar, Lakewood CO, image credit: VanMeter Williams Pollack*



*Existing Westminster Mall and proposed downtown, Westminster CO, image credit: Torti Gallas & Partners*

This section includes descriptions and examples of success stories of suburban reform, offering built examples of the type of outcomes that can come from reforming land use patterns. Case studies are organized by context of intervention and include brief descriptions of the transformation as well as links to additional information about the example.

## Suburban Retrofit

The transformation of underutilized sites within suburban land use patterns is a growing area of development as municipalities respond to the growing public dissatisfaction with the lack of walkability and placelessness that the suburbs are known for. Yet suburban reform, which this Guide seeks to enable, can help meet the growing demand for mixed-use urbanism.

### Belmar, Lakewood CO

Belmar is an example of the conversion of a failed 1960s-era 100 acre enclosed shopping mall into a walkable urban town center. Bordered by two high-volume state highways, the transformation of the site included reintroducing 22 blocks of urban street grid, prioritizing walkability and mixing of uses, and providing for public spaces and amenities as well as a variety of housing options. Redevelopment replaced the former mall site with 80 stores, 250,000sf of office space, 1700 residents, and 9 acres of plazas, parks, and public spaces. Pedestrian movement is prioritized over vehicular, creating a vibrant new downtown for Lakewood.

*Image credit: City of Lakewood, for more info: <https://tinyurl.com/t8m9j9e>*



*Since its transformation from a dead mall to a vibrant urban center, Belmar is now a community center for Lakewood, a suburb of 142,000 just west of Denver and just east of the foothills of the Rocky Mountains.*

### Thornton Creek Bioswale, Seattle WA

Thornton Creek is an example of the transformation of an abandoned surface parking lot into a water treatment facility and public open space. Part of a highly urban watershed in northeast Seattle that drains to Lake Washington, the conversion of the water quality channel included the creation of a 2.7 acre public green space with an integrated bioswale that treats 680 acres of stormwater runoff from the Northgate neighborhood. The space serves neighboring multi-family housing, restaurants, and commercial uses, providing native vegetation and wildlife habitat. The project not only removed an environmental detriment in the prior parking lot but replaced it with an environmental asset, in a multi-functional public amenity.

*Image credit: sVr Design Company, for more info: <https://tinyurl.com/r7vje2a>*



# SUCCESS STORIES

## Grow DeSoto Market Place, Desoto TX

Grow DeSoto Market Place is an example of the conversion of a vacant, though centrally located, strip mall into a small business incubator with a mix of adjacent uses. The transformation of the site included subdividing the large commercial space into 300-400sf micro-retail spaces for 60 small businesses as well as the addition of residential and food truck dining courts adjacent to the main structure. The project required the reduction of regulatory barriers including zoning and parking requirements. Redevelopment has revitalized an existing built asset in a prime location within DeSoto and provides renewed vitality to the aging corridor.

*Image credit: Monte Anderson, for more info: <https://tinyurl.com/uwdkdp9>*



*The Grow DeSoto Market Place retrofits a strip mall with mixed-use startup businesses and housing which improves the public realm by activating a parking lot with restaurants. The suburban land use reform was enabled by a few simple changes to land use regulations.*

## Columbia Pike, Arlington VA

Columbia Pike is an example of the transformation of an outdated auto-based commercial strip into a thriving mixed-use multi-modal corridor. Particularly as a result of crucial zoning code changes along the corridor, the reform has enabled mixed-use development construction with sidewalk widening and lighting installation for pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly purposes. The street has become a Main Street serving the surrounding neighborhoods with a vibrant public realm that is in contrast to the former placelessness of the corridor. Walkability and the provision of affordable housing were key components that the community desired from the corridor retrofit and, in its implementation, these goals have been achieved.

*Image credit: Dover Kohl, for more info: <https://tinyurl.com/s669vwu>*



## Downtown Westminister, Westminister CO

Downtown Westminister is an example of the transformation of a former shopping mall site into a downtown for the suburban city. The transformation of the 105 acre site will include 2,300 residential units with substantial affordable housing and 1.7 million square feet of commercial including a grocery store, shops, restaurants, a movie theater, and office space, as well as parks and civic spaces.

*Image credit: Torti Gallas, for more info: <https://tinyurl.com/y64dyb7f>*



*Aerial rendering of the proposed new downtown for Westminister, CO set to be completed in 2024.*



# SUCCESS STORIES

## Lancaster Boulevard, Lancaster CA

Lancaster Boulevard is an example of the transformation of an uninviting auto-based arterial into a lively pedestrian-friendly public realm. Wisely leveraging infrastructure investments, the City of Lancaster invested \$11.5 million dollars in streetscape improvements, which in turn attracted \$130 million in private investment and generated \$273 million in economic output within four years.\* The new development that the corridor retrofit added 48 new businesses to the street and 802 permanent jobs. Meanwhile, the traffic calming that the transformed street includes a 33% decline in collisions and a 66% reduction in collision-related injury.

\* Source: California Redevelopment Association

Image credit: City of Lancaster, for more info: <https://tinyurl.com/uwxnfw>



## Octavia Boulevard, San Francisco CA

Octavia Boulevard is an example of the conversion of San Francisco's Central Freeway, deemed unsafe following the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, into a successful surface-grade multi-use boulevard. Designed to be both visually appealing as well as pedestrian-friendly, the reform of the highway to a boulevard has led to a transformation of the surrounding neighborhood, both in terms of increase in property values as well as improved quality of local amenities.

Image credit: Steve Boland, for more info: <https://tinyurl.com/wp4zfmq>



*Rather than causing traffic chaos, the conversion of a highway into a boulevard led to a thriving public realm in the Hayes Valley neighborhood.*

## Parsons Alley, Duluth GA

Parsons Alley is an example of the transformation of 3 acres of abandoned properties into a lively pedestrian mixed-use entertainment district in a suburb of Atlanta. Through a public-private partnership, the project adapted an historic building while also adding new structures, all while carefully matching the character of the town. The retrofit provides new public space for the community, while relegating parking to the rear of the development, creating a walkable neighborhood gathering place while still attracting visitors to the new and inviting urban destination.

Image credit: Kronberg Wall, for more info: <https://tinyurl.com/t4stsm2>



*The success of the pedestrian-oriented infill redevelopment at Parsons Alley illustrates the importance that the public realm plays in determining quality of place and in catalyzing further investment.*

# SUCCESS STORIES

## Local Corridor Reform

Many Michigan communities have corridors designed solely to move automobiles, lined with parking lots and shopping centers. Retrofitting these thoroughfares into vibrant people-oriented urbanism can be a challenge, as the scale of the blocks are often enormous and the existing infrastructure usually creates a dangerous environment for pedestrians. Some Michigan communities have been able to reform (or at least plan to reform) their locally-controlled corridors, as these examples show.

### East 9 Mile Road, Ferndale MI

In 2015, a road diet reducing travel lanes from 4-to-3 allowed for the addition of bike lanes, protected mid-block crosswalks, and street trees on the corridor. Municipally-owned construction projects, including a library expansion and a courthouse renovation, added entrances and windows along the sidewalk rather than orienting toward the parking lot and new development will replace single-use buildings and parking lots with multi-story mixed-use buildings.

*Image credit: Google Street View*

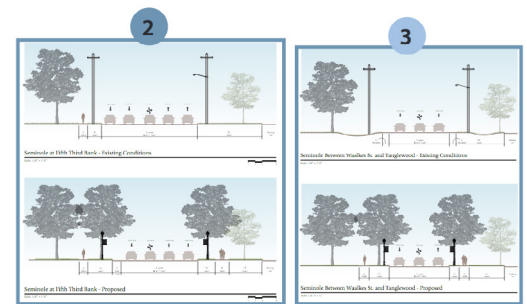


*The corridor is evolving, to become an extension of the streetcar downtown at West 9 Mile Road.*

### Seminole Road, Norton Shores MI

Part of a larger master planning process to address underutilized properties in this area of the city, the proposed transformation of the Seminole Road corridor incorporates public realm improvements like sidewalks, nonmotorized pathways, uniform lighting, and other street amenities. Norton Shores recently began this streetscaping program with the intent to fully transform the heavily auto-centric corridor into a vibrant, walkable, multi-modal thoroughfare.

*Image credit: City of Norton Shores*



*Proposed transformation of the corridor includes a road diet as well as incorporation of street trees, sidewalks and cycling paths, crosswalks, and pedestrian-scaled street lighting and signage.*

### Van Dyke Avenue, Warren MI

Part of a larger master planning process to incorporate a walkable mixed-use urban center into an auto-dependant development pattern, the reestablishment of a street grid and its integration with this major arterial will begin the evolution of the corridor. Surrounded by new development, including a hotel, grocery, mix of retail and office, and residential as well as existing civic institutions, the transformation of the corridor is critical to the succes of surrounding redevelopment.

*Image credit: Gibbs Planning Group*



*The corridor retrofit will encourage desired economic development and improve the quality of life for Warren residents.*

## MDOT Corridor Reform

In many cases throughout Michigan, the corridors that communities would seek to reform are state highways with design controlled by Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT). While state standards can pose obstacles to corridor retrofit, when agency policy does not coincide with community desires, the following examples illustrate communities that worked with (or around) MDOT requirements in order to reform their auto-oriented corridors into walkable pedestrian-friendly streets.

### Harvey Street, Hudsonville MI

Unable to make changes to the divided state highway running through the center of town, Hudsonville chose to create a parallel main street. Harvey Street was redesigned as a shared-use pedestrian street and designated it as primary frontage for adjacent parcels. A former auto dealership was renovated into a farmer's market, restaurant, and event space, and Hudson Center became the first new three-story mixed-use building fronting on the new pedestrian street.

*Image credit: City of Hudsonville*

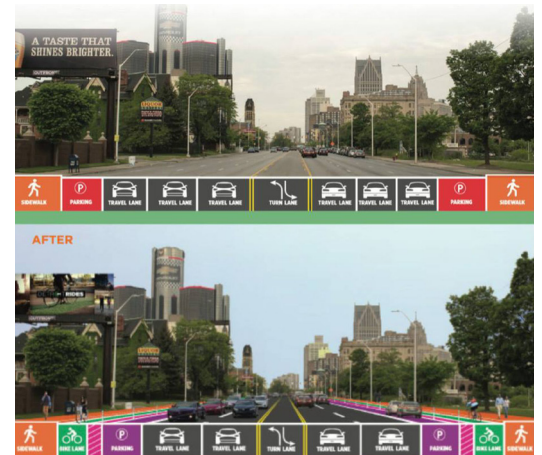


The “woonerf” or shared street design de-prioritizes the car in favor of pedestrians and other non-motorized modes of transport.

### East Jefferson Street, Detroit MI

As the main corridor from downtown Detroit to the eastern suburbs, East Jefferson has recently undergone a road diet. The extremely wide thoroughfare has transformed from seven traffic lanes to five, with green painted and protected bike lanes, red boxes for bus stops, and clearer pedestrian crosswalks included as part of the redesign. The conversion was intended to road increase safety and accessibility from the neighborhoods to the Riverfront and Belle Isle.

*Image credit: Detroit Greenways*



In addition to the above examples, the following resources provide additional guidance in working with MDOT standards and requirements in attempting to reform outdated auto-oriented corridors through incremental code reform:

- *Guidance for Trunkline Main Streets* by MDOT acknowledges a need to balance the vehicular movement function of state roadways with the functions of definition of local sense of place and provision of access within community centers of activity.
- The *Road Diet Informational Guide* was developed by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to help communities understand the safety and operational benefits of road diets in order to determine if they might be helpful in their location.
- *Sharing the Road: Optimizing Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety and Vehicle Mobility* by MDOT provides a comprehensive review of safety improvements, including a set of recommended best design practices for walking and bicycling in Michigan.
- The *Multi Modal Design and Development Guidebook* (M2D2) outlines MDOT’s intended process for collaborative street design in the context of a fully multi-modal transportation network.

# OUTSIDE RESOURCES

In addition to MEDC's [Redevelopment Ready Communities Best Practices](#), the following resources offer a broader context to the topic of code reform. A variety of model ordinances and guidance tools for reforming development regulations are available from various sources. These examples suggest a range of possible expanded code reform efforts and may be useful in envisioning future initiatives.

- [The Project for Lean Urbanism](#) has developed a [Lean Code Tool](#) that provides zoning code hacks that intentionally lighten red tape. This compact coding tool offers a contrast to the excessive controls, redundancies, contradictions, delays, and unintended consequences found in conventional codes (and some form-based codes, for that matter). While the Lean Code Tool is a guide to text amendments for existing ordinances, it still needs to be calibrated to local capacity and conditions and should be viewed as a introductory “quick fix” as compared to the recommendations found in this guide.
- [The Center for Applied Transect Studies \(CATS\)](#) supports the [SmartCode](#), a model transect-based planning and zoning ordinance developed on a framework of environmental analysis. The SmartCode is a comprehensive regulatory tool that addresses all scales of planning, from the region to the community to the block and building. The SmartCode differs from other form-based codes in that its community-scale and block-scale are written explicitly for zoning in order to directly encourage walkable mixed-use neighborhoods, combat sprawl, preserve open lands, and reduce energy use and carbon emissions. The one-size fits all coding template requires calibration for local conditions.

To supplement the base SmartCode, CATS has commissioned numerous transect-based Modules, most of which are annotated by subject-area experts with advice for calibration. Included is the [Sprawl Repair Smart Code Module](#) (toward the bottom of the page), prepared and annotated by Galina Tachieva, author of [The Sprawl Repair Manual](#). The downloads are free and open source.

- [The American Planning Association's](#) 2009 guidebook (PAS Report 556, [Smart Codes: Model Land-Development Regulations](#)) delivers a broad reference point for understanding land development regulation, including 21 model codes focused on a variety of topics promoting Smart Growth Principles including encouraging mixed uses, preserving open space and environmentally sensitive areas, providing a choice of housing types and transportation modes, and making the development review process more predictable. The guidebook offers an overview of the structure of land-development regulations and provides guidance on developing model smart growth ordinances.
- The [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's](#) Smart Growth program has developed an extensive [website](#) for a range of coding tools, audits, model codes, and other helpful publications. Many of these tools and codes suggest modest to complete regulatory overhauls and would therefore require larger initiatives than that outlined in this guide. Additionally, EPA's website on [Green Infrastructure](#) has a host of materials, information, and model codes.
- The [AARP](#) has developed a [Livable Communities](#) initiative supporting the efforts of neighborhoods, villages, cities, and rural areas to be great places for people of all ages. As part of the initiative, their [Roadmap to Livability](#) 6-part workbook collection provides a framework of broad livability best practices, community listening sessions, housing, transportation, health services and community supports, and economic development strategies that can then be adapted to the specific needs and preferences of a local community. Each workbook provides planning tools to help complete a livability project, as well as implementation funding recommendations.
- [The Form-Based Codes Institute](#) provides a resource page for those interested in form-based codes, a specific urban coding approach which represents the most holistic version of land development regulation reform. Their [Resources](#) offer a variety of ways to increase understanding of form-based code terminology and usage, as well as opportunities to review a library of best practice sample codes, connect with supporting organization and technical assistance, and access additional information.

# OUTSIDE RESOURCES

- Powered by Congress for the New Urbanism and funded by the Rauch Foundation, [Build a Better Burb \(BBB\)](#) is an online publication dedicated to improving suburban design and planning. Through articles and insights, BBB helps suburban residents, developers, and officials explore solutions from across the country that can be applied to their communities. Tools related to financing suburban redevelopment and design for retrofitted infrastructure, as well as strategies for public education and community organizing around reform, can be found on the site.
- The Urban Land Institute has published [Shifting Suburbs: Reinventing Infrastructure for Compact Development](#), providing examples of eight different case studies where suburban redevelopment projects tackled infrastructure challenges. Successful strategies, as well as common challenges, are outlined in the report.
- The [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency](#) provides their [Green Infrastructure Municipal Handbook](#), giving local governments with a step-by-step guide to growing green infrastructure in their communities. The handbook discusses funding options, retrofit policies, green streets, rainwater harvesting policies, and incentive mechanisms.



*Old Town Lansing MI, image credit: Mary Madden*

# CONTRIBUTORS

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## Primary authors include:

**MALLORY BACHES**, Program Manager of the Congress for the New Urbanism, has practiced urban design for two decades. She leads the Project for Code Reform and additional programs focused on land use policy, regulatory reform, affordable housing, and local government outreach.

**LUKE FORREST**, director of the Michigan Municipal League's Civic Innovation Labs, leads the organization's statewide technical assistance and outreach around redevelopment, community planning, walkability, public transportation, and environmental sustainability. Luke now serves as Executive Director of the Community & Economic Development Association of Michigan (CEDAM).

**SUSAN HENDERSON**, Principal of PlaceMakers, LLC, is an architect, urbanist, and code nerd. Susan works with local governments to assess their internal capacity for code reform and right-size the solution for the context. She has the honor of serving on the CNU Board of Directors and the FBCI Steering Committee.

**MATTHEW LAMBERT**, a Partner at DPZ CoDESIGN, is a Michigan native now managing DPZ's office in Portland, Oregon. He has nearly two decades of experience in coding, planning, and design, from whole regions to infill and affordable housing to campuses. He is an internationally recognized coding expert and serves on the CNU Board of Directors.

**MARY MADDEN**, Principal of Ferrell Madden, has nearly 20 years of experience in urban planning and design, community development, and historic preservation at the federal, state, and local levels. Expertise includes town planning and urban design for public and private sector clients, with an emphasis on revising zoning codes to promote smart growth, sustainability, and New Urbanism.

**RICHARD MURPHY**, Michigan Municipal League Program Manager in the League's Policy Research Labs. He assists communities with transportation and land use planning, placemaking, economic development, and technology issues.

**LYNN RICHARDS**, President and CEO of the Congress for the New Urbanism, has worked with dozens of state and local governments to implement city building approaches by developing policies, urban design strategies, and environmental solutions to create vibrant, prosperous neighborhoods.

**BILL SPIKOWSKI**, founder and principal at Spikowski Planning Associates, is a veteran planner and advisor to local governments. His meticulous research, creative solutions, and clear persuasive writing and graphics assist local communities and have received over a dozen state and national awards.

## Additional contributors include:

People and organizations that reviewed, contributed, and otherwise helped inspire this document.

**AVERY KELLY**, Program Fellow, Congress for the New Urbanism

**BRETT HANLON**, MEDC, RRC® Planner, Lansing, Michigan

**MICHELLE PARKKONEN**, MEDC, Director, Redevelopment Ready Communities®, Lansing, Michigan

**KAREN WIEBER**, MEDC, Senior RRC® Planner, Lansing, Michigan

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- Russ Soyering, *City of Traverse City*
- Carmine Avantini, *CIB Planning*
- Leah DuMouchel, *Beckett & Raeder, Inc.*
- Jill Bahm, *Giffels Webster*
- Lynee Wells, *Aligned Planning*
- Suzanne Schultz, *Progressive AE*



*Santana Row, San Jose CA, image credit: Wikipedia*



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