

aenspire : educate

Town Centre Principles

United States Selection

www.aenspire.com

Place Making

Often underestimated and overlooked when trying to maximise density are the places between buildings. When budgets get tight these are some of the first expenses to get trimmed, however that may do injustice to the extra value a well designed place can create.

Place making is the art of providing a 'third place' .

First Place = Living

Second Place = Working

Third Place = Play - community gathering and social interaction

A town centre should strive to create the most visually attractive third places with the highest level of convenience and amenity to residents, workers & shoppers.

A successful third place is like a magnet drawing people in to interact, to eat, to shop, to linger, to romance, to relax and to play. It makes people come back time and time again.

The more people, the more activity, the more potential for retailers to make sales and the higher the rent.

The more visually stimulating, the better views, and the higher prices achieved from on-looking residences and offices.



Grote Markt, Antwerp. The sense of place here is like what New Urbanists strive to replicate.

Create a Stimulating Design

In creating a town centre development you are trying to build in a matter of months or a few years what traditionally evolves over decades.

Many town centre developers have tried to recreate the look of historic buildings. Others overprescribe signage and tenant design rules to match the architects highly choreographed design vision. Disneyland can easily result.

The general consensus in the US to create a stimulating environment, that is neither bland nor Legoland:

- Hire at least three architects to work on the project. For example one may be in overall charge of the retail, a residential over retail building and the overall concept, a different architect to design a signature building near the town square or at the entry and another to design other residential or office buildings.

- Allow tenants some freedom in their choice of façade materials, awnings and signage. This may extend to street furniture, umbrellas and even paving. Not necessarily to destroy the architects vision, just to mix it up a little.

These are not easy to manage but it creates diversity where otherwise everything can look very contrived.

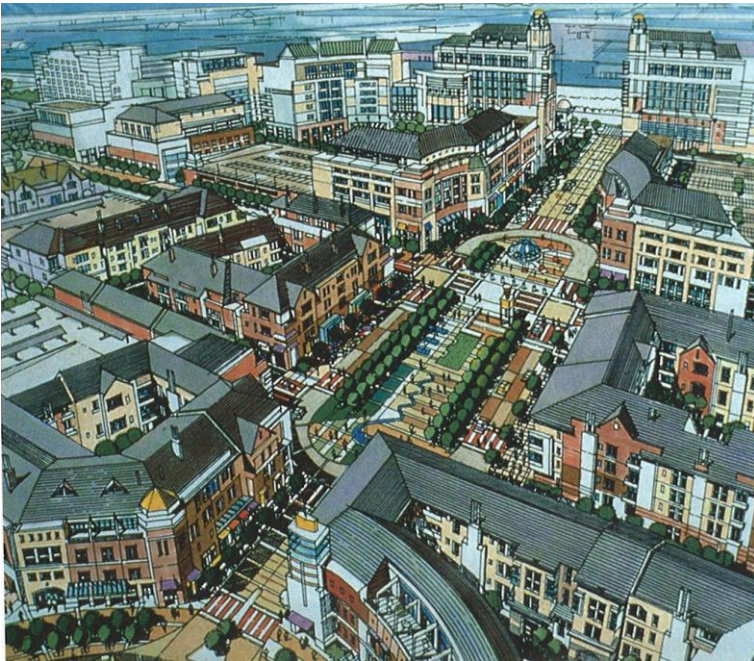


Santana Row, San Jose. While recreating historic buildings may not be everyone's ideal, Santana Row borrows from the past to look like it has evolved over time.

The Town Square – Open Space

The town square, plaza or green is an open space area intended to be the focal point of the third place.

Keep it as open as possible. A nice open area that on paper has no economic value seems ripe for placing rentable space on. Resist the temptation. The best squares are those where people can see past the trees over the square and to the retailers on the other side. It can also deteriorate the views from upper level residential. There is value to overlooking open space.



Addison Town centre, Texas



Southlake Town centre, Texas. W there is lots of room the massing of the buildings does not create a nicely enclosed space

The Town Square



The Greene,
Dayton Ohio

Glory Park,
Arlington Texas



Crocker Park, Ohio



Minzer Park, Florida

Town Square Landscaping

Trees, grass and water are naturally nicer to look out onto. This is lacking in many European squares but they more than make up for it in centuries old architecture, fountains, statues and cathedral facades. An all paved surface can work however its difficult to make it inviting especially for young children. There are many examples of hard surface public plazas developed in the last 50 years which end up nothing more than skateboard parks, irrespective of the contemporary art placed there.

Too much landscaping creates a different effect. The space may look good but it loses its practical benefits for gathering and social interaction. A square should provide space for people to gather for events, for children to run around, for concerts, markets and other community events.



Paseo Colorado, Pasadena, Los Angeles



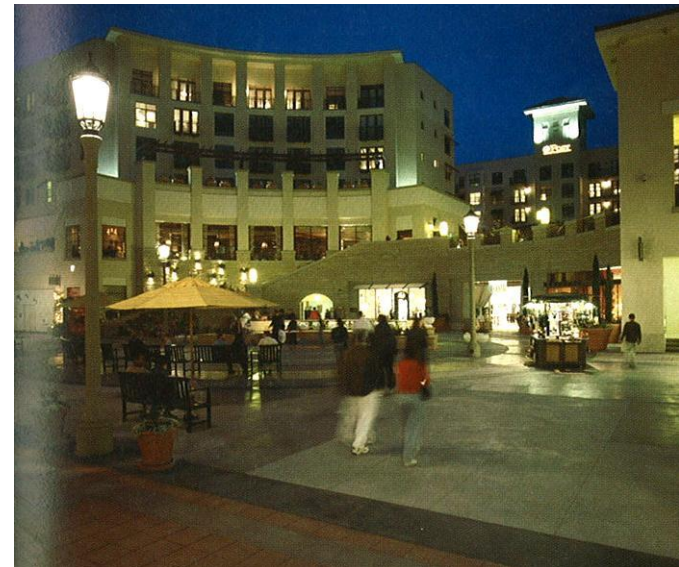
Birkdale Village, Carolina

The Town Square – Enclosure

Being enclosed by buildings really creates the feeling of place. The scale of the buildings should be proportional to the size of their separation. If the buildings are too low it feels too open, too much like a suburban strip mall and makes it difficult to attract pedestrians across the square (to retailers on the other side). If the buildings are too high it interferes with direct sunshine and can make the square feel dark, windswept and uninviting. In dense cities where people are used to the latter you can get away with much more height in the surrounding buildings.



Birkdale Village, Carolina



Paseo Town centre, Colorado

Façade Design

Facades facing the main retail street should be at a pedestrian scale:

- Materials used for the first and second levels should have substance. They get a lot of attention so need to be of higher perceived quality, texture and substance than upper levels. As you go higher the detail can drop off with interest created by balconies and overhangs.
- Facades need to be stimulating. This may mean articulating the building plan along the façade or it may mean changing materials, colors, balconies, or overhangs. Many town centres try to convey the impression of the façade is comprised of separate buildings to avoid blandness.
- Roof lines should also create interest, it may be different heights, pitches or protrusions.



Downtown Silver Spring, Maryland



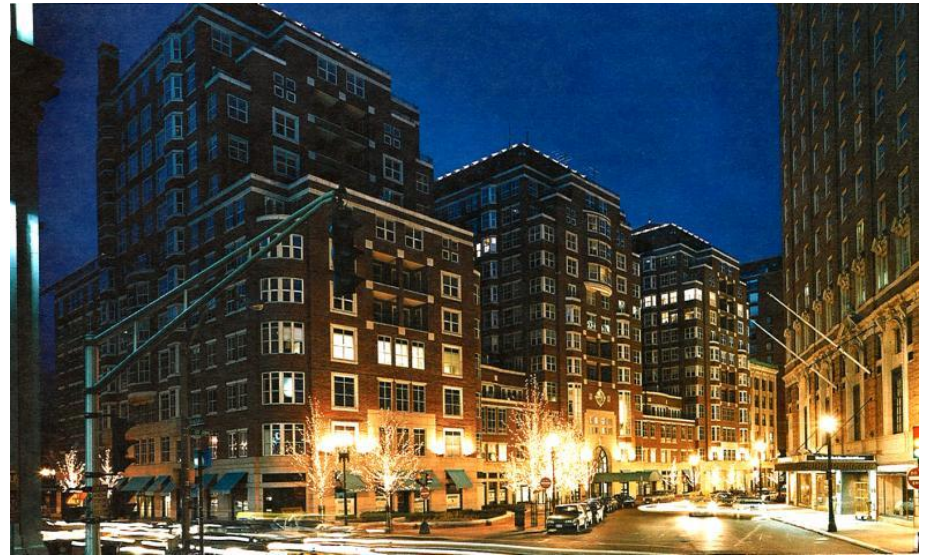
Santana Row, San Jose, California

Building Massing & Height

Consideration should be paid to massing of the buildings along the street and the sense of space it conveys to pedestrians below



Legacy Town centre, Plano, Texas



Heritage on Garden, Boston

Building Setbacks

Depending on the scale of the street the height of the immediate façade should be on average 2 to 4 storeys.

In general residential or office above that should be stepped back, not only for sunlight but so not to impose on the pedestrian scale. Stepping back residential does provide great terraces for those first units or the potential for a green roof.

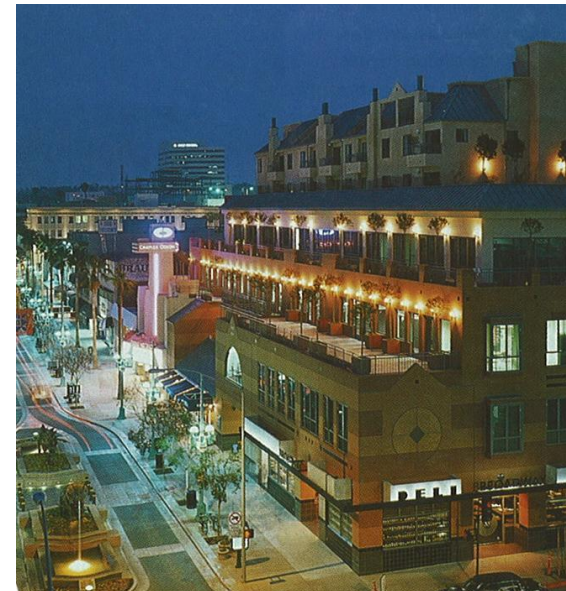
You want to create a sense of enclosure to street without being overpowering. In select areas such as a signature building you may want to rise vertically much higher without a setback to mix it up.



Fruitvale, Oakland California



Village at Shirlington, Virginia



Santa Monica, Los Angeles

Corner Treatments

Paying special attention to the corners including different design and height helps create a distinctive entrance and to frame the town centre.



The Grove, Los Angeles



Pentagon Row, Virginia

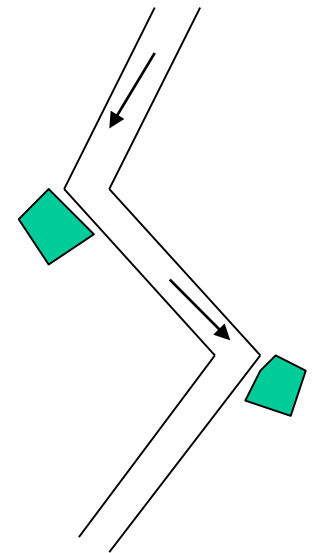
Terminating Vistas

The terminated vista is the building that you see straight in front of you if you look down the street. It is analogous to the anchor tenants at each end of the mall, whenever you are walking their signage attracts you closer. Terminated vistas commonly attract the greatest rentals even though they may be set at the deepest point in the development. They provide a great anchor because shoppers must past everyone else to get there.

Although not that efficient multiple terminal vistas can also be created using a zig zag street pattern.



Market Commons at Clarendon, with Barnes & Noble attracting the prized terminating vista



Terminating Vistas on a zig zag retail street

Horseshoe

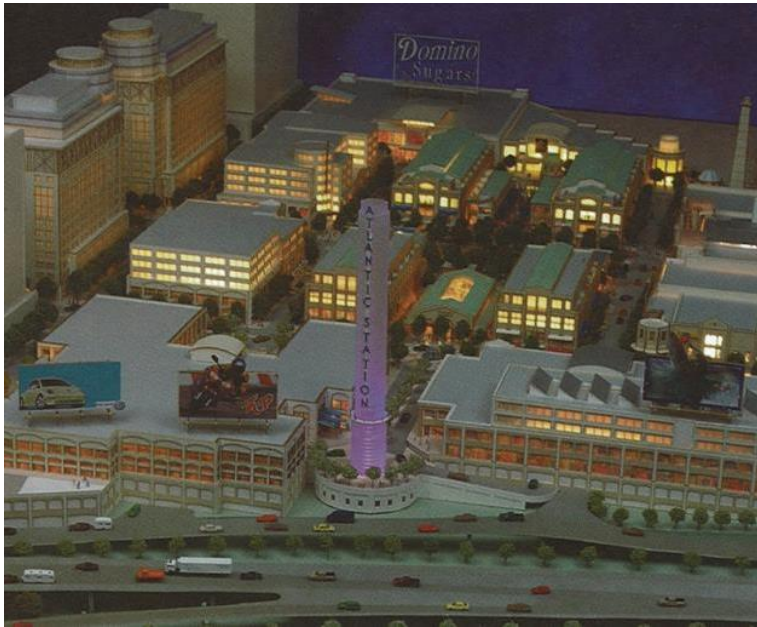
Many retailers do not like to be at the far ends of a strip of shops as there is typically less foot traffic at the ends. Creating a horseshoe means everyone is essentially in the middle. Some plans create a horseshoe that includes a minor access cross road at the apex.



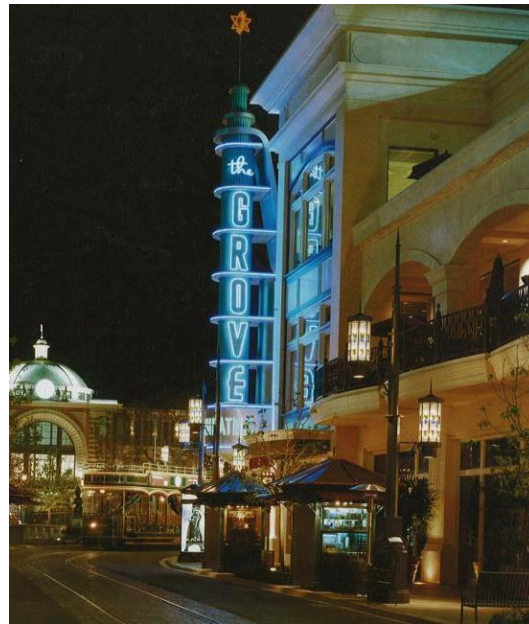
Market Commons at Clarendon

A Signature

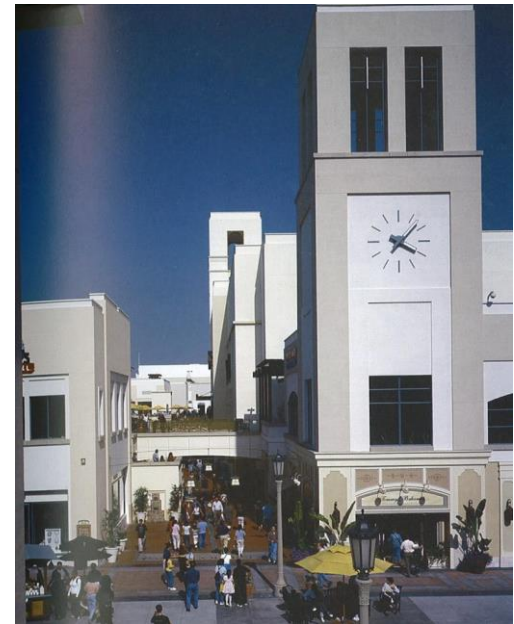
Like the traditional town clock, or the bell tower on the cathedral consider a signature icon to add recognition to the town centre.



Atlantic Station, Atlanta



The Grove, Los Angeles



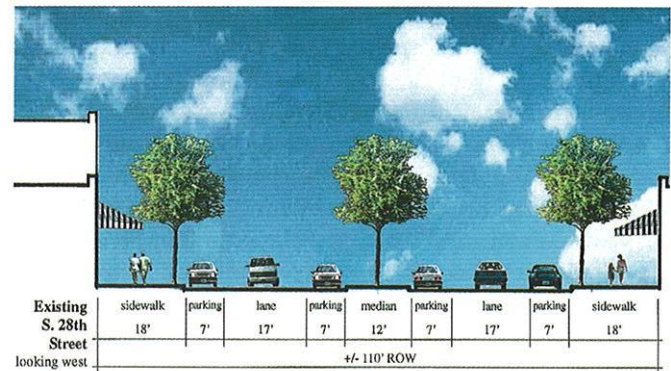
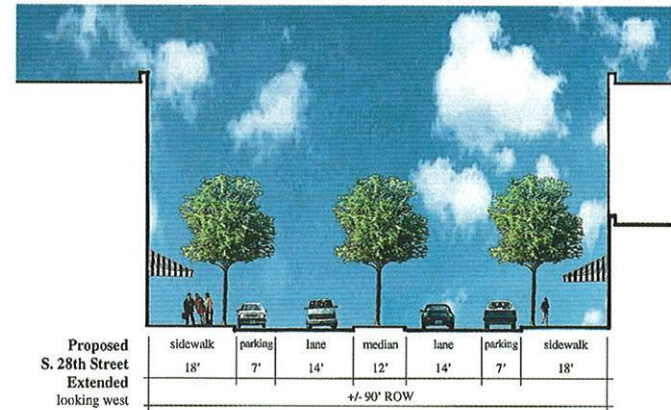
Paseo Colorado, Pasadena, Los Angeles

Streetscape

The street is as important as the openness of a square. For town centres without a square the street becomes the most important third place.

The ideal street has:

- Parallel parking. Parallel parking buffers pedestrians on the sidewalk and calms street traffic. On street parking is becoming more desirable in many centres than all pedestrian streets. Angular parking is OK but creates more of a visual barrier to the square or other side and makes a wider road to cross.
- A strip of landscaping buffering pedestrians from parked cars and provides for locations of utilities.
- Trees along the sidewalk for shade and looks with seating, shade street lighting in between.
- Curbs extending out to increase visibility of crossing pedestrians to vehicles.
- A wide sidewalk suitable for two couples to pass each other.



Street sections and dimensions for existing and proposed streets at the Village at Shirlington in Arlington, Virginia.

Sidewalk Seating

Outside café seating areas creates an engaging and active street scene. Placing seating next to the street, rather than the facade ensures pedestrians walk next to shop fronts - where retailers want them.



Bethesda Row, Maryland



Mountain View, California



Silver Spring, Maryland



South Beach
Miami

Sidewalk Furniture

Consider interesting forms of street furniture:

- Large chairs – like an outdoor living room
- Movable chairs so people can make their own groupings
- Street side bar height seating with bar, so pedestrians can relax and eat an ice-cream while watching activity down the street or across on the square
- Include street side tables not necessarily linked to any restaurant or café
- Certain sculptures can act as convenient seating



Clear Springs Outdoor Furniture



Second Street, Austin Texas

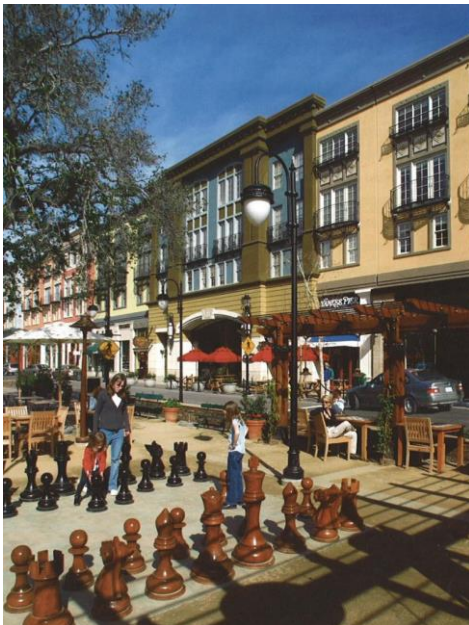
Engage Peoples Interest

You want children and their parents to spend time in the town centre, you want them to feel at ease and have fun. You want to attract people back. The more time they spend and the more they come back the more likely they will drop into a retailer to buy something. Therefore create a town square that engages and keeps pedestrians interest and keeps them in the town centre.

- Provide free wireless internet
- Electronic community bulletin boards
- Children's playgrounds
- A kids climbing rock sculpture
- Large chessboard on the ground
- Lifelike statues



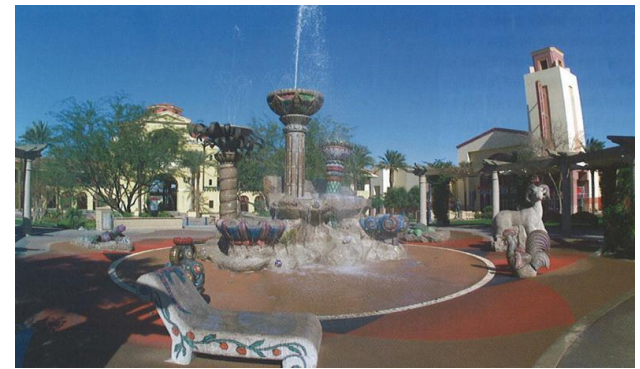
Market Commons at Clarendon



Santana Row, San Jose, California



The Grove, Los Angeles



Town Square at Cathedral City, California

Art & Amenities

Interactive art is best. The 'Bean' a stainless steel sculpture that acts to mirror onlookers against the backdrop of the lake and skyscrapers in Chicago's Millennium Park is a very contemporary piece of art that attracts a lot of attention and interaction.



The Bean, Millennium Park Chicago

A number of US town centres have greens which are transformed into ice rinks during winter. This creates a spectacle night and day both for skaters and onlookers.



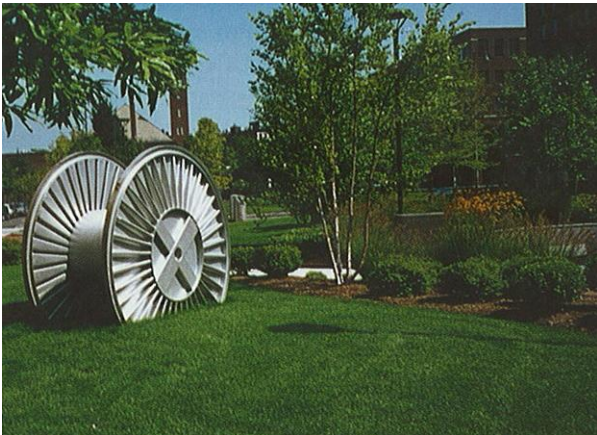
Belmar, Colorado

Temporary Art

Management may use local or renown artists may to display some of their work on a temporary basis.

Temporary Art can be in different forms such as on the plaza, hanging across the square or street, lamppost banners, embedded into the ground, attached to the buildings, created on the pavement – who knows what else, its art !

The key is to create community interest to effectively market the town centre as the place to shop live or work.



University Park at MIT. The wheel is a historical reference to the old factory that was on this site.



The Greene Dayton Ohio.
Local High School paintings made into banners

Water Features

Water features add interest but the best results are when they become interactive.

If you provide a fountain or a shallow pool, provide seating around its edge so people can sit and touch the water.

Pop fountains, which spray water up from the ground without any surface pool are a hit with kids. They are very popular in many US town squares and parks.

Fire Pits are also gaining popularity



Addison Arts District, Addison Texas



Southside Works, Texas

Lighting

Lighting should enhance the evening experience in the town square. A well lit environment can actually attract people to shop in the evening.

Provide low level lighting onto the town square. Light enough to be safe, but not so bright it looks like a prison yard.

Consider providing the ability to add additional lighting for concerts and night time events.

Up-lighting of trees can work well however arguably there is nothing like lights within the trees to create a romantic ambience to the town centre.



Town centre Drive, Valencia California



Riverside, Atlanta



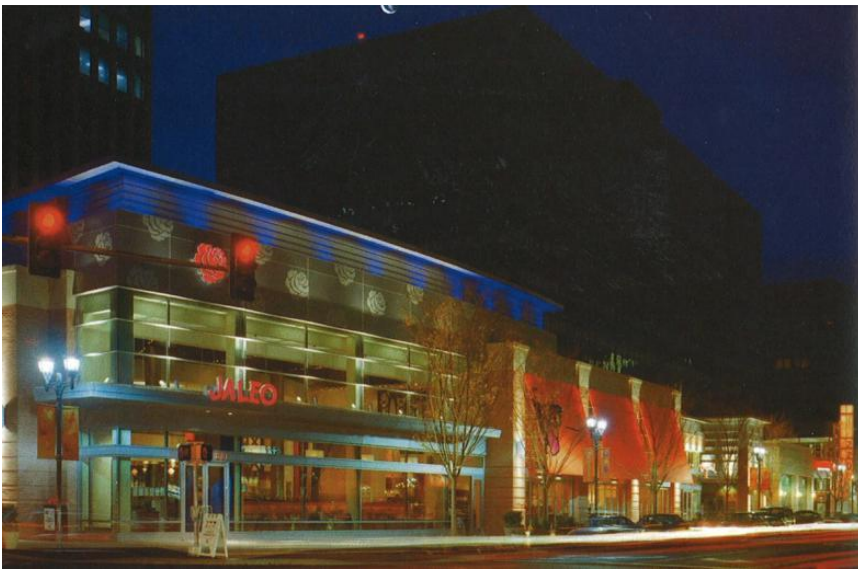
Town centre Drive, Valencia California

Lighting cont.

Allow tenants flexibility over the lighting of their facades to create interest however be careful not to allow tenants signage or internal lighting to spill out overpowering the general ambience of the development.

Provide for special lighting considerations around artwork and signature buildings.

Water features with interactive night time lighting and music add further interest.



Crystal City, Arlington Virginia



The Greene, Dayton Ohio

Retail Mix

The ideal list of retail tenants should include a mix of national chains and local businesses to create diversity. In the US this is typically 60/40. You need the chain stores for pre-leasing and their financial strength, however too many can create a contrived overly corporate environment. The remaining 40% being convenience and locally owned stores - mom & pop operations. They don't usually have good bank statements but they add vitality to the town centre.

There is a trend in the US to restricting the number of national brand tenants in new infill developments, often coming from the City level who want to promote local business. In a town where national brands are everywhere a developer along Scottsdale canal is leasing to only 'no brand' retailers to create more diversity.

Coffee Shop/ Café creates early morning traffic.

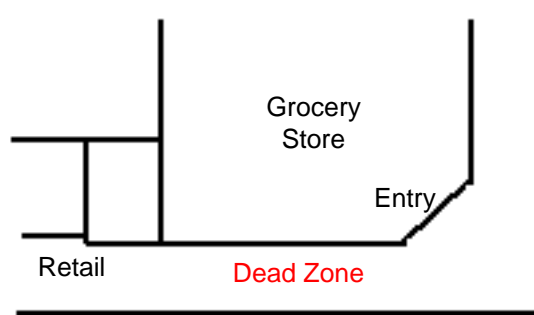
Delicatessen, bakery, lunch bars for workers and shoppers during the day.

Restaurants/Bar sustains activity into the evening, although care must be made to protect residential privacy especially noise and fumes.

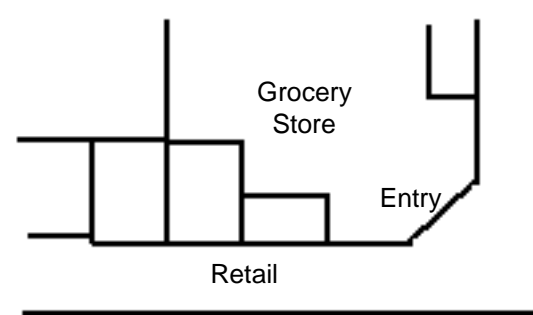
Everyday convenience stores are often neglected in new mixed use developments. Post office, Butcher, Fruit shop, Wine shop, Hairdressers, Drycleaners, Pharmacist, Video Store (a dying breed as kiosks and online increase) etc. This has been a common gripe of residents who live in within upscale town centres dominated by fashion and high end restaurants such as Kierland Commons in Scottsdale Arizona – residents have to go out of the 'town centre' to buy groceries.

The Blank Wall Effect

Grocery stores are desirable as an anchor and may demand prime position such as on the entrance corner or at a terminated vista however its preferable to minimise blank wall space along the main retail frontage.



Poor



Better

Small retailers often depend on impulse purchases. As a pedestrian approaches a uninteresting wall they speed up and studies show it takes them a couple of shops to slow down again.

The same effect occurs with banks, real estate agencies, mortgage brokers and offices. Needless to say they can kill the ambience of the street experience.

Second Level Commercial

In mixed use projects you may want a second level above retail for commercial tenants. This separates residential further from the street increasing privacy.

The 2nd level is suitable for small professional offices such as Doctors, Dentists, Lawyers, Accountants, Architects & Engineers and as Health Clubs & Beauty Spas.

However, special consideration must be made for pedestrian access to the 2nd level from a main street frontage foyer and also from garage parking potentially in a parking garage to the rear of the street or underground.

Restaurants have mixed results where they do not have a presence on the ground floor, especially if they are not a recognised brand. Being visible from the street with balcony seating offering better views helps mitigate.

A trend in highly desirable retail locations is for developers to force retailers to take 2 levels and provide internal access.

In some locations developers have encouraged artists and galleries to set up on a 2nd level while better paying commercial tenants are sought. This creates its own pedestrian activity for retailers especially during gallery events.

Planned Activities

Planned activities add to the vibrancy to the town square. They increase the number of potential customers for retailers, attract potential residents, aids neighborhood security and creates publicity (especially during selling and leasing periods). Designing the street system so the street adjoining a square can be blocked off when necessary with a suitable alternative for thru traffic can provide the extra hardscape for community events:

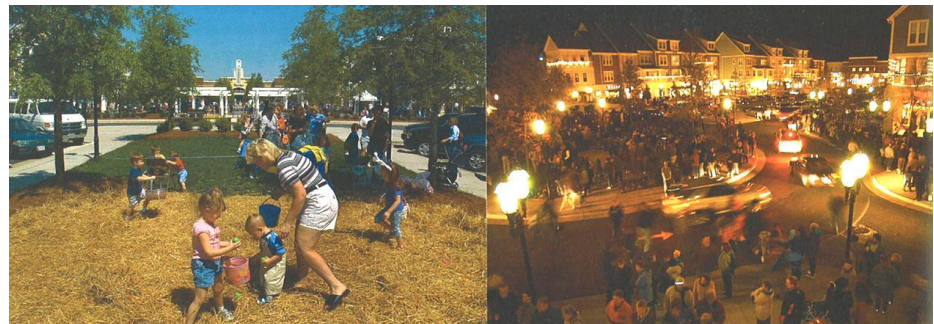
- Street painting
- Vintage Car show Farmers market
- Art Fairs, Food & Wine festivals
- Outdoor Theatre, Jazz, musicians, bands and cultural events
- Fundraising events
- Xmas, Guy Fawkes, Easter and other holiday events



Valencia Drive, Street Painting



Southlake Town centre, Texas



Birkdale Village, Carolina

Surrounding Area

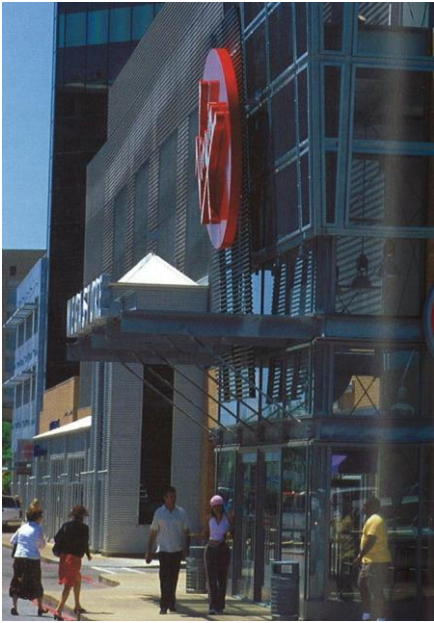
Continue the pedestrian environment behind the immediate town square and retail streets. By stepping down the density to townhomes you create a more integrated interface between single family and the high density town centre. Provide convenient linkages to encourage residents to walk to the town centre. This can also remove an ugly rear to the centre.



Market Commons at Clarendon

Parking

Parking is best placed underground and the entrance should be clearly signposted and easily accessible near but not on the main retail street. You want people to find it easily but you don't want the entrance breaking up prime retail space and impacting on the pedestrian experience. For above grade parking consider design to reduce the visual impact of a garage building.



Mockingbird Station, Dallas Texas



South Beach, Miami

District vs. Vertical Mixed Use

City North in Phoenix, Arizona is being planned along the “District Concept”. In general uses are separated horizontally into districts within the Town centre. A residential district, an office district, just retail etc (although ground level retail is mixed with other uses in some locations). Funding, construction phasing and issues over access and parking are intended to be easier.



- Residential / Residential above Retail
- Office / Office above Retail
- Hotel
- Department Stores
- One / Two-Story Pavilions / Restaurants
- Parking Garages



Select Projects 1

Promenade,
Coconut Creek, Florida



Riverside, Atlanta



Excelsior & Grand, St Paul Minnesota

Select Projects 2



City of Brea, California



City of Brea, California



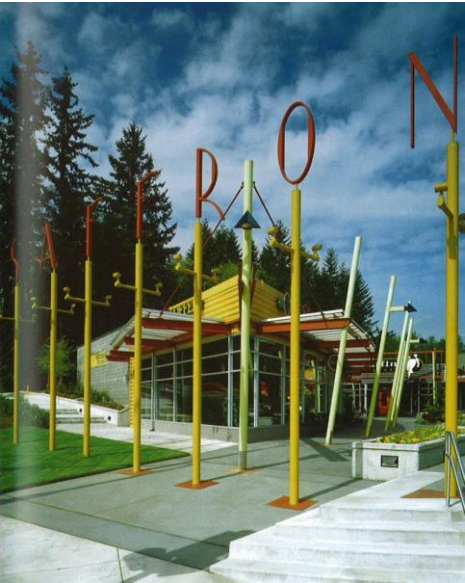
Burien Square, Washington



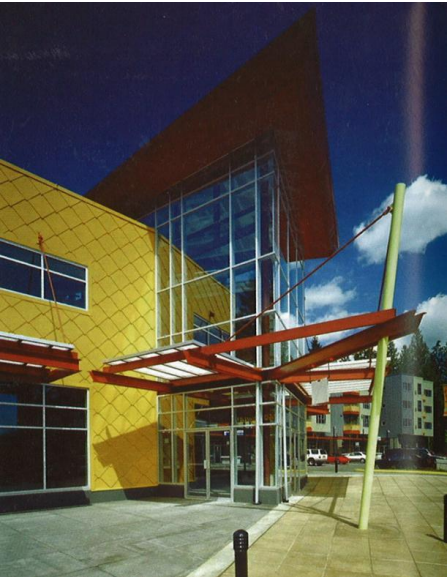
Residences are primarily located above retail throughout the Square, with private entrances and secured garage parking. Thoughtfully designed with quality finishes and a variety of floor plans.

Burien Square, Washington

Select Projects 3



Saffron Town
centre Seattle



Select Projects 4



Glory Park, Arlington Texas



City Gateway, Salt Lake City, Utah



Orenco Station, Portland



Sony centre,
Tokyo



Select Projects 5



Bracknell, UK

Riverwalk, New Jersey



Pentagon Row, Virginia

