

RECONNECT: A NEW IDENTITY FOR SUBURBAN COMMERCIAL SPACE

**A Thesis Presented for the
Master of Architecture
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

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August 2013

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DEDICATION

To my family, who have encouraged and supported me throughout these three years of graduate school. My parents have been there for almost anything that I really needed, even if it was simply a call in the morning to wake me up. My uncles and my grandmother have made it possible for me to finish my studies. I also dedicate this to my girlfriend, Raine, who has been wonderful and patient with me as I worked towards the completion of this thesis.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to my thesis committee for their help during this busy semester. I know that each of my committee members has been extremely busy, and I appreciate their help in working out the many pieces of this project.

ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I address a critical situation found today within the American suburbs. Many suburban developments lack human scale and places for community interaction traditionally found in the downtown model of the city. The places of interaction, or forums, are inherent in the downtown model and are built into the block structure, and close to where people live. They promote multiple uses and the healthy interaction of the residents of the community. In the suburban model, the places of interaction are separated from neighborhoods and residences, they are highly insular and geared towards a single purpose, usually shopping.

This project is an attempt to investigate the possibilities of adaptive reuse of the spaces built with a consumerist mindset that have disrupted American communities since World War II. The structures of malls or big box stores have been used in the past to try to remake public spaces, to varying degrees of success. The purpose of this investigation is to propose a system that can be implemented in order to restore the sense of community to the American suburbs. Specifically, the program will focus on the phenomenon of the mall or big box stores that inhabit much of the suburban areas, and the feasibility of using these locations as a way to try to restore community through adaptive reuse. I feel that these sites have a great potential to become a center or node to bring a more human scale and walkable, sustainable community to the suburbs.

In the project, I propose to look at an individual shopping mall, West Town Mall in Knoxville, Tennessee, which is, in my opinion, a product of sprawl and the consumer culture. Through adaptive reuse and densification of the site, the mall and its surroundings will better connect to the site and to the surrounding neighborhoods. This is not intended to be an isolated case, but the connection point of a network of sites that can make transit and walkability a greater possibility in suburban neighborhoods.

PREFACE

“Suburbia may be paved with good intentions, but mainly it is paved.”

Architect Douglas Kelbaugh¹

This was a personal project for me because, for the majority of my life, I have lived in suburbia. Most of my youth was spent in the suburbs, and I have good memories from my life in the suburban neighborhoods where I lived. For this reason, I did not set out with the intention of getting rid of suburbia or the slice of American culture that it represents. Instead, I wanted to work with the current subdivisions and try to create connections between commercial interests and neighborhoods in the existing patterns. It is my hope that this will help suburban neighborhoods to grow in a healthier manner that will be a more sustainable community in the years to come. With greater connection between the neighborhoods and the commercial spaces that currently drive them apart, residents of the community will be able to make the choice to walk from their home to the store. By building with the existing neighborhood growth patterns, time and money can be saved over trying to fundamentally change these patterns. The community can be sustainable through economic viability, walkability through the site and surrounding neighborhoods, and promotion of practices like urban farming, now practiced in many cities, but easily adapted to the suburban scale.

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INTRODUCTION

Consumerism

A recent article in USA Today reported that new advances in technology allow retailers to follow the eyes of their customers while shopping. This new development will give companies a sense of what each customer is interested in and allow them to tailor ads to the customer based on their preferences.² Interactive displays within stores like Target have hidden cameras that can follow the customer as they look at items on the shelf, and the shopper's cards that are distributed at these retailers also track the spending habits of the shoppers. Jayne O'Donnell and Sarah Meehan give an example in their article *How Retailers Study and Test Us to Maximize Profit* (2012), of one story of this intrusive marketing highlighting the negative effects of these strategies used by retailers.³ A California teenage girl bought a pregnancy test at a nationwide retailer and received targeted baby product ads at her home. This alerted her parents to their daughter's possible pregnancy, and created a backlash of public anger towards the company.⁴ The retailer's targeting of their customers can be a manipulative and intrusive marketing strategy, because it seems to be merely a means of tracking what a person has spent and how much they have profited the retailer, without considering whether the marketing will be ultimately harmful to the person they are targeting. This approach turns the person into an object, a consumer of the products of the company. These events are indicative of a larger phenomenon in society today, what we know as consumerism.

Gary Cross, in his book *An All Consuming Century* (2000), defines consumerism as "the belief that goods give meaning to individuals and their roles in society."⁵ This is visible in the layouts of the typical American mall and box stores, which manipulate the consumer with the goal of making them believe they must buy some type of good. Almost all stores today follow certain patterns that place the flashier or more expensive items in the path of the customer's eyes as they walk through the store. Controlling people's views

can lead the customer to spend more on items that they don't need. This has become routine, almost a ritual of consumerism.

Consumerism in the Built Environment

The traditional, city-based model of retail connects merchants with both their store and their neighborhood. Often, especially in the past, the merchant would live in the same building on the floors above the retail level. The retail functions within the block structure of the city, where different buildings and uses meet and overlap. This helps to promote a healthy community and a sense of *civitas*. In this traditional model of retail, the retail or commercial conditions bring the community together and enable people to interact on a daily basis. Ironically the opposite holds true today in suburban commercial centers. Communities are actually driven apart by current retail models that break free from traditional patterns creating gross excesses and leading to irresponsible waste. For many, negligence and waste have become a way of life. This is apparent in many cultural phenomena today, including fast food, growing landfills, and the plethora of disposable items on the market today. These lifestyles of waste and excess are by-products of consumerism.

This environment of encompassing consumerism in many of people's lifestyles today also makes itself apparent in the built environment. One of the most visible

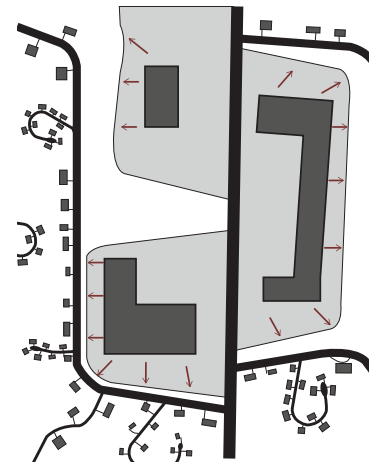


Figure 01. Box store model fragments and drives apart neighborhoods.

Diagram created by author in Adobe Illustrator.

manifestations of this consumerist mentality in society today is known as sprawl. Sprawl as the basic expression of a consumerist mentality in the built environment is the logical conclusion of turning a citizen into merely a consumer. The manner in which sprawl is created in the suburbs today discourages interaction between people. In a sprawling shopping district, people are funneled directly from their cars into an immersive, windowless shopping experience with spaces so large that people do not need to meet and talk. When this method of retail and marketing is promoted, the company is valuing its customers solely on the revenue they provide for the store. This occurs when a person or corporation no longer sees their customers as a person, but as a means to the end of profit. Referring to people by their account number instead of their name and using automated voice messaging systems in lieu of actual customer service representatives are just a couple of examples of this attitude.

Within the term sprawl can be found problems derived from consumerism, including a lack of organization, temporary construction, and automobile centered growth patterns. Galina Tachieva, in the book *Sprawl Repair Manual* (2010), defines sprawl as, “a pattern of growth characterized by an abundance of congested highways, strip shopping centers, big boxes, office parks, and gated cul-de-sac subdivisions—all separated from each other in isolated, single-use pods.”⁶ This offers a lot less to the neighborhoods in the suburbs than in the city where the uses of buildings meet and overlap. The isolation of the single-use pods creates a scenario where a resident must drive some distance to fulfill even their most basic needs. One may live close to a person without ever meeting that person or interacting with them. Tachieva continues to argue that the alternative to these fragmented communities is what she calls a “complete community.”⁷ Such a community would have a mix of uses that provides for the daily needs of residents, including shops, offices, transit, and recreational places all within a smaller walkable community.⁸ This is a good theory or model when looking at the suburbs, but in practice, the application of this

model will be different for every case. Although a community using this model is based on the city center, the size and scale must be completely different for the suburbs. Merely placing a city center or downtown in the suburbs would not work because the density and demographics of the suburbs would not support this.

There is a marked difference between traditional, city-based models of retail and commercial enterprise in the type of commercialism exemplified by the mall or big box store. The traditional model is built at a community scale, where people can walk from their home to the store with little difficulty instead of driving a much larger distance. In cities, the traditional model still exists and is promoted. When a city is creating a new commercial space, the space is already structured toward the creation of the traditional type of building. The existing shops and buildings create a framework into which the new construction can be placed as infill. For this reason, the new and the old stores in a city function in the same manner. With the big box store model, the developers strive for cost over quality. Author and Editor of *New Urban News*, Philip Langdon, in his book *A Better Place to Live* (1994), wrote,

At least in the short run, one-story buildings are likely to continue proliferating because they are cheap to construct and the land they occupy is inexpensive.⁹

Stores are more permanent when placed within the fabric of the city block than when rapidly and cheaply constructed in the edge conditions of the city and the suburb. The scale of the store in the city model is also much smaller, which makes a huge difference for the relationship between the shopkeeper and the customer.¹⁰ In a smaller store, the shopkeeper has a better view of activities that occur within the store. They can see and respond when a customer is in need of assistance. A smaller store also means that the shopkeeper can greet and get to know the customers who frequent the store.

Two examples of the most common forms of shopping developments today are the shopping mall and the big box store. The original shopping mall is attributed to Viennese architect Victor Gruen in the 1950s.¹¹ He was known, along with other retail focused

architects of the 1940s, for promoting a “shopping town” that already contained many of the elements of the modern mall, including anchor stores and surrounding surface parking lots.¹² In 1956, however, Gruen changed this model, creating the first fully enclosed shopping mall.¹³ The original malls were made highly restrictive by their owners. Owners were interested in targeting a particular audience, consisting mainly in middle-class, white suburbanites. Dolores Hayden looks at the work of historian Lizabeth Cohen, who mentions that,

...mall owners were often anxious to restrict public access, and one of the ways of achieving this was to make access by public transit minimal, or to organize bus routes to reinforce market segmentation and racial segregation by race and class.¹⁴

Originally conceived of as a safer shopping environment, where people from miles around would come to shop, these models became a replacement for community-based retail experiences. They still fulfill this original purpose, but do so at the cost of the community. When smaller community-based retail is replaced by a big box store, the company that owns the store can control the market. Quality is often reduced, and more personal services of the smaller stores is lost. Moreover, the store treats the employees in a similar manner to the customers, paying minimum wage for more menial tasks.¹⁵

When malls or big box stores move into an area, the



Figure 02. Store at shopping mall; facade facing large surface parking lots with limited vegetation
Photograph taken by author.

smaller local stores cannot compete. The more populated center containing “mom-and-pop” stores is replaced with edge nodes, where big box stores compete against each other with larger signs and bigger sales. Because of their large size, the box store cannot be easily classified with other stores or businesses for tax purposes or for zoning. Many are actually classified as warehouses, which changes the code requirements for the store.¹⁶ Corporate regulations for these “warehouses” can dictate that these facilities have no windows, and also regulate the use of interior columns and the amount of parking that the store is required to have.¹⁷ By focusing the structure and views inward, the customer sees only what the corporation wants them to see, which allows them to more efficiently push and sell certain products. The corporate regulations that push for this type of model are promoting consumerism in all of their transactions, and discouraging the kind of interaction between the store and the neighborhood that would promote the building of community.

The companies that build and own these stores do not consider them to be permanent buildings. In her research, Ellen Dunham-Jones found that the big box stores face such stiff competition from other big box stores and online retailers, that they often intentionally overbuild, knowing that a particular location will not last for very long, but will bring them a net profit while it is operating.¹⁸ This is an important thing to understand, considering that when these retail locations do fail, the controlling company does not assume responsibility for the building or the site. These “temporary” buildings are quickly abandoned and left to deteriorate, becoming an even greater eyesore than the original building was and further fragmenting the suburban neighborhoods. The American landscape is left scarred with multiple “dead” malls and big box stores surrounded by seas of parking.

The consumerist mentality is also manifested in the automobile culture in America. One of the effects resulting from the advancement of the automobile is that the scale

required for retail or commercial enterprises has changed completely. A person who is walking along a sidewalk does not require large signs with bright lights or heavy letters to see what is inside a store. The driver of a car coming down a highway at 50 miles per hour has only a few seconds to process the same information as the pedestrian. Advertisers realized this long ago and created signs specifically to appeal to drivers. Large, well-lit signs with bold letters entice the drivers to shop at a store. There is also an increased need for parking spaces to allow the driver to leave their car and enter the store.

Newer models for more efficient parking and shopping evolved to draw the customers into the store. In the book *Learning from Las Vegas*, Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steve Izenour spoke of the ingenuity of the parking engineers who created the surface parking lots of Las Vegas. They speak of it as almost a consumerist version of Versailles or the piazzas of Italy,

The A&P parking lot is a current phase in the evolution of vast space since Versailles. The space that divides high-speed highway and low, sparse buildings produces no enclosure and little direction. To move through a piazza is to move between high and enclosing forms. To move through this landscape is to move over vast expansive texture: the megatexture of the commercial landscape. The parking lot is the *parterre* of the as-



Figure 03. Parking used in lieu of the traditional form held by the plaza
Diagram created by author in Adobe Illustrator using photograph taken by author

phalt landscape. The patterns of parking lines give direction much as the paving patterns, curbs, borders, and *tapis vert* give direction in Versailles; grids of lamp posts substitute for obelisks, rows of urns and statues as points of identity and continuity in the vast space.¹⁹

Here the authors chose to view the A&P Parking lot in a positive light, as a spatial descendant of the piazzas of Versailles. They did not, however call for a replacement of the piazza with the parking lot. In the suburbs today, the parking lot has become an ubiquitous substitute for public spaces like plazas.

Jane Jacobs, one of the most influential writers on the topic of community and city life in America, wrote about several factors that make a street vibrant and make it feel safer for inhabitation in her book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*.²⁰ These factors are the demarcation between what is public and private space, eyes upon the street from the street's natural proprietors, and the sidewalks that have fairly constant pedestrian traffic.²¹ Jacobs' basic vision for a living street is one that is used by people, not just for automobile traffic. In order to have a vibrant community that is related to a street, people need to be able to see it, to walk on it, and to see a distinct boundary between the street and its more private surroundings. Without these enticements, pedestrians will avoid a street, and the street will become a "dead" street, which is rarely ever used for foot traffic. The blocks of a gridded, mixed-use community have more of the characteristics that make a street a living street. Suburban developments seldom have any of these properties, a result of the separation of uses held to by suburban developers.

With the advancement of automobile production and use in post World War II America, people had the freedom to travel further on a daily basis. Communities, in rural, suburban, and even urban settings have been resized and scaled differently in order to meet the demands of vehicular transportation. These developments, now scaled for automobile travel are the constituent pieces of sprawl. The residents of these developments are not in a position today to be able to conveniently reach any stores or public places

without driving to get there.

Community

Human beings are social creatures, drawn to communicate and interact with each other. A basic way in which people interact in their physical environment is within the community. Thomas Moore, a psychotherapist and best-selling author on spirituality, in his book *Care for the Soul* (1998), wrote,

One of the strongest needs of the soul is for community... [the] Soul yearns for attachment, for variety in personality, for intimacy and particularity. So it is these qualities in community that the soul seeks out, and not likemindedness and uniformity.²²

The word “community” can be an exclusive term; a country club could be considered a community, but it excludes those who cannot afford to pay to become a member of that community. These communities, however, are based on the qualities of like-mindedness and uniformity, which Moore rejected as the basis for the community that each soul longs for. Many of the American suburban neighborhoods have been based on this exclusive model from their inception, as evidenced by terms used to describe the suburban developments, such as “enclave”. This is noted by Dolores Hayden when she speaks of developers of the affluent suburbs excluding people on the basis of race, status, or education.²³

James Howard Kunstler, in his book *The Geography of Nowhere*, describes his college experience in a small town New York school. This was different for him than his childhood in a suburban development where the houses were based upon the same split-level model. Kunstler remarks that,

At a time when small towns all over America were dying, little Brockport remained relatively robust... The reason for the town’s healthy condition was obvious: the college. It furnished jobs and a huge volume of customers for Main Street’s businesses. It gave the place some intellectual life—totally absent in the neighboring burghs where all the lesser institutions of culture had been replaced by television...

It was scaled to people, not cars. It had the variety that comes from a mixed-use community. It's amenities lay close at hand.²⁴

Two issues are brought up by Kunstler in this description, both of these relate to the issue of sprawl. First is the missing sense of community in suburban developments that lack diversity. The second point is the benefit he attributes to a mixed use community that he saw as exemplified by the small town of Brockport. These characteristics helped to keep Brockport and other similar towns in America alive when many towns were dying.

In suburban areas, dwellings can be placed without much thought behind the design or community function of neighborhoods. Developed tracts of land have been sold to residents as a "community", sometimes the developers will even tell potential customers that a "planned community" will exist when the developers have the ability to buy large tracts of land and develop the entire plot at once. Many residents of suburbs today do not even need to interact with their immediate neighbors. In fact, the designs of many developments discourage communication between neighbors. A lack of communication will definitely contribute to a breakdown of community. Houses in some modern developments have done away with the traditional use of a functional front porch that created both a sense of community and made the front facade of the house more prominent. In some cases garages now take up the majority of the front facade, and the porch becomes merely a small overhang for avoiding the elements. Phillip Langdon, in his book *A Better Place to Live*, noted in 1994 that sometimes two or three car garages in some places became the entire front facade of the house, and sometimes even had more square footage than the house itself.²⁵

In order to mitigate the appearance and destructive nature of these garages to their homes, developers will often place little patches of green, which Kunstler has dubbed the "nature band-aid".²⁶ A prevalent attitude of developers that any trouble created by the developer can be solved with some planting is problematic. It implies that developers

already know there is a problem and they are trying to cover it up.

By separating the uses, the housing never merges with commercial or retail as it does in the town or city. Instead, when residential does meet with commercial, there is a marked divide between the scale of the residential units and the scale of the commercial units. This is evidenced by the way that the big box store or the mall interrupt the flow of residential neighborhoods.

Many problems arise with the big box store model, including economic and social distress. Ellen Dunham-Jones noted that,

Elizabeth Kneebone and Emily Garr's Brookings Institution report showing that poverty in suburbs grew at rates nearly five times faster than in central cities between 2000 and 2008. They also point to the dire lack of short-term shelters, public housing, and social services in these communities.²⁷

Power usage is much greater to sustain a sprawling suburban community than a dense community with more mixed uses. Also, the gasoline consumption goes up as commuters spend more and more time between the developments where they live and the places where the jobs are more prevalent.

Civitas

In Aristotle's philosophy, there was a corresponding relationship between virtues and the vices that were a contradiction of these virtues. The vice of consumerism also corresponds with a particular virtue, which is known as *civitas*. This is a civic virtue held by the ancient Romans and Greeks, and thought to be essential to living in a community. *Civitas* requires the participation of the citizen in the public realm. This requirement or duty is not necessarily found in the modern community, for example an online community does not require any real commitment from its members, they can remain anonymous to each other and still function as the community was intended.²⁸

The belief of consumerism that the person is measured in terms of physical possessions is antithetical to the concept of *civitas* because it is a concept based on selfishness.

Civitas as a virtue leads people to have the ability to live and work well together, while consumerism contributes to the fragmentation of society through the introduction of greed and envy based upon the number of possessions of neighbors.

The virtue of *civitas* is not something that comes naturally to people. It is a habit that must be learned over time. This notion of *civitas* is the heart of public life; if living well together is an art, then there must be a place where that art is cultivated. Aristotle and his teacher Plato both taught this art of living well together in the *agora* in Greece, a place that combined the ideas of a marketplace with the education and civic functions of the city. In the context of a modern city or other residential area, Dunham-Jones states that civility is what is cultivated by the creation and maintenance of public spaces.²⁹ In society today, public spaces still teach that art of living well together. The interaction in public spaces like plazas, museums, and theaters are essential when teaching civic virtues to children and adults alike.

To residents of the city, the number of opportunities to learn the art of living well together as a society present themselves on a more regular basis than they do to the people who commute to these spaces. In the suburbs today, public space is not a major focus for developers of neighborhoods. While some suburban communities have an element of public space or maintain restrictive covenants that require some duty or exertion of the homeowner, it can be argued that the suburban development has no sense of the community that is implied by the virtue of *civitas*. Dunham-Jones quotes sociologist David Brain, "A case can be made that the erosion of meaningful public space by suburban development patterns... is part of what has become a trained incapacity for public life."³⁰ There is a lack of public space in the American suburbs today, and the argument can be made that this is a perversion of true community which requires duty and participation from its citizens. As a result there will not be the proper civic response to the

places where people live, exemplified by the virtue of *civitas*.

Suburbs were looked on in the past by architects and planners as the support spaces for cities, bringing goods and jobs into certain regions of the city. Designers and engineers were often aware of the need for these spaces and provided the transportation and infrastructure to allow the suburbs to function. This view of the suburbs has largely changed among architectural professionals; many choose instead to ignore the suburbs and any construction that occurs there. The attitude that the suburbs are not worthy of the time and efforts of architects is a problem, because it condemns the people currently living in the suburbs to poor design and an unsustainable lifestyle. Frederick Law Olmsted saw the danger of haphazard suburban villages rising on the borders outside of cities even around the time of the Civil War, calling them “fragmentary, half-made towns”.³¹ He also saw, however, that the suburbs were a necessary part of urban life, “No great town can long exist without great suburbs.”³² This is important because it contradicts those who are willing to ignore the current manner in which development projects occur in the suburbs. Letting sprawl intensify in the suburbs, and allowing them to deteriorate will worsen the towns and cities by hurting the support system for those cities. The suburbs need to continue to support the cities,

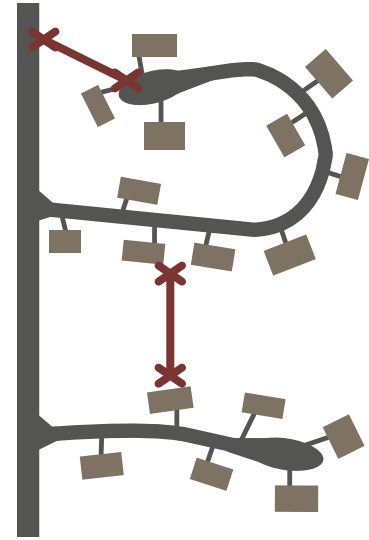


Figure 04. Typical *Cul-de-sac* neighborhood with no grid and limited connectivity between homes. Diagram created by author in Adobe Illustrator.

but there must also be a change in the way that construction occurs in these places.

Furthermore, research done by Ellen Dunham-Jones and June Williamson concluded that a more dense, walkable community in the suburbs also has:

...greater economic output and higher incomes, higher levels of human capital, higher membership in the creative class, higher levels of patented innovations and of high-tech industries and employees, higher housing prices, and higher levels of happiness.³³

For suburban areas, the problems of sprawl, inappropriately scaled stores and neighborhoods, and the general lack of spaces in which to learn the virtue of civitas are the most pressing problems, but some solutions to the overall lack of design can be found in instances of good design. Design cannot be mass produced as it has been done for the box store model, irrespective of the individual site, region, and topography. This negates a sense of place or the unique qualities or characteristics of a region.

The suburbs of which Olmsted complained were places where planning and design were limited. Suburbs simply extended out haphazardly from connecting streets to the towns and cities. There were many reasons for this, some relating to the overall dearth of American planning and architecture unlike our European counterparts. Whatever the reasons, however, these suburbs were a place where there was development with little planning or design.

In *The Geography of Nowhere*, Kunstler describes several of the great American cities. From their conception, the cities were laid out in a logically arranged grid. Washington D.C., New York City, and Philadelphia each have benefitted from their grid systems, usually laid along the north to south and east to west axes. In fact, the entire American system of platting public land, was arranged according to a gridded system similar to the arrangement of the cities.³⁴ The logical arrangement of this system is highly

organized and facilitates connections between different places.

This notion of the national grid creates a powerful image. Within the patterns of the suburbs today, however, the grid is something almost nonexistent. A resident in a suburban development today may live on a curving street that dead-ends in a *cul-de-sac*, or in a similar condition in other forms of pod developments. Typically these *cul-de-sac* streets have only one exit to the main thoroughfare, and from one street to the next, there is limited connectivity.

There is a lack of acceptable circulation, whether vehicular or pedestrian, through the majority of contemporary suburbs. In a traditional suburban setting, the streets are gridded, creating greater access between homes and destinations. A pod development, on the other hand, has only one access path, usually ending in a *cul-de-sac*. Each of these smaller *cul-de-sac* roads has only one exit towards the main arterial streets. There is no communicating road in between the pods, and there is usually no sidewalk wherein pedestrians may circulate.³⁵

Creating a grid does not necessarily mean that people living in a neighborhood will learn civic virtues like *civitas*, but it is a way to encourage more people to learn these virtues. Gridded streets create more opportunities for action and interaction than in pod neighborhoods which are isolated from neighboring streets. Traffic in a gridded community comes from multiple directions and from multiple neighborhoods, while the flow of traffic in a pod community generally comes from one direction and one main road. The increased intersections in a community based on a grid provide more opportunities for people to meet and learn the art of living well together.

CHAPTER 1

Building for Civitas

Case studies

The Vanderbilt Comprehensive Health Care Clinic at One Hundred Oaks Mall; Nashville, TN: Gresham, Smith and Partners

In recent years, many cities have found that the pattern of malls and big box stores are more than just eyesore, but also harmful to the existing fabric of the city. They change not only the land around them, but the building patterns within the city and the surrounding regions. One of the negative effects of these development patterns is that the uses of buildings in the city and surrounding regions become highly segregated. Unlike traditional city centers, which may have mixed uses such as apartments above retail in the same building, the mall developers discouraged this mixed usage.

This was the case in Nashville, when the owner of the failing One Hundred Oaks Mall partnered with the over-tasked and expanding Vanderbilt Medical facilities in order to create something unique and beneficial for both parties involved. Vanderbilt Health Care had expanded beyond the capacity of their former facility and was in desperate need of a new expanded center. The cost to build a brand new medical center, however, turned out to be much greater than the cost of



Figure 05. Original facade of 100 Oaks Mall in Nashville.

Photograph on Gresham Smith and Partners website.



Figure 06. 100 Oaks facade after renovation by Gresham Smith and partners.

Photograph on Gresham Smith and Partners website.

renovating an existing building. Because of its location and the condition of the mall at the time, Vanderbilt was taking a risk deciding to partner with the developer who owned the mall, because previous attempts to bring new life to the mall had ended in failure.³⁶

When Vanderbilt approached Gresham Smith, they told the firm that they wanted to emphasize ease of access. The way that Gresham Smith decided to achieve this was to use the older circulation of the mall as a means of wayfinding through the space. Instead of the feeling of a hallway, the new spaces would have a series of destinations, culminating in a final space that would give the feeling of a sense of arrival.³⁷

One challenge facing both the contractors and the architecture team from Gresham Smith was the existing stores residing within the mall. Some of these stores remained open throughout the entire construction phase at the mall. Eric Bearden, AIA, the project architect, elaborated on the difficulties involved in working with the residents of the mall. In an interview given for the Gresham Smith and Partners Showcase, Eric stated that not only did major renovations include the recladding of the entire building while the tenants were still located there, but much of the construction had to occur within the most busy and profitable months for those stores, summer and at Christmas-time.³⁸ Other



Figure 07. 100 Oaks Entryway prior to renovation.

Photograph on Gresham Smith and Partners website.



Figure 08. 100 Oaks Entryway after renovation.

Photograph on Gresham Smith and Partners website.

problems for the designers included the existing parking lot, which was confusing and contained no real green-space, and creating an open, friendly, non-sterile atmosphere for the clinic. As the redesign of the space and the surrounding parking was decided upon, the architects also called for the planting of 100 oak trees on the site. This had been the namesake for the mall, but the existing site had lost all vestiges of being a forested area.³⁹

The atmosphere created by Gresham Smith is pleasant and inviting. Instead of the usual, unpleasant design and sterile colors used in the standard development practices for hospitals today, One Hundred Oaks has warm colors and broad halls and spaces. This sets patients at ease from the start, and brings people through the space in comfort.⁴⁰

In spite of these difficulties, the renovations moved forward. The results have been successful, not just in the creation of the hospital for Vanderbilt, but also in uplifting a depressed area of Nashville. Gresham Smith and Partners showed the capability of good design to inhabit older, less sophisticated spaces without tearing out the infrastructure of that space. In the process, they have created a more mature design that will also age well in the years to come.



Figure 09. 100 Oaks renovated parking with increased vegetation.

Photograph on Gresham Smith and Partners website.

Worlds Away: Towards a New Suburbanism; LTL

Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota, was the initiating force behind the Lewis, Tsurumaki, Lewis (LTL) project entitled “Worlds Away”. The exhibition called for an investigation of suburbia as a particularly American phenomenon. Artists and architects explored suburbia in a provocative manner, exploring the sense of “values and assumptions that underlie their development, as well as their subsequent transmutations, permutations, and failures.”⁴¹

The architectural firm of LTL participated in the exhibition by Walker Art Center, and decided to explore the landscape on the roof a big box store as a means of provoking the conversation regarding suburban life in America. In looking at this scenario, they hoped to introduce the possibilities of

...producing new efficiencies of land use, shared infrastructure, and reduced transportation without fighting the desires that feed the popularity of the quotidian suburb.⁴²

Through this process of investigation, LTL used storage structures based on the module of the box store’s aisles and racks within the column grid. These structures pierce through the roof, making the divisions for the housing above.⁴³

For the homes created above the box store, LTL created a continuous side yard, running the length of each

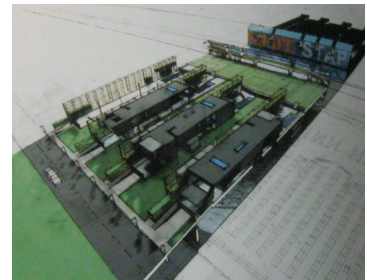


Figure 10. LTL Landscape Above Suburban Box Store.

Image; *Worlds Away: New Suburban Landscapes*.



Figure 11. LTL Sectional Perspective Through Box Store.

Image; *Worlds Away: New Suburban Landscapes*.

house. This became a shared public space between units, and also the dominant feature of the houses where activities can occur. Within the units, there is a distinction between public and private space. Private spaces are treated as objects within the house, while public spaces follow a free-plan system, flowing around the private spaces.⁴⁴

LTL also chose to reconfigure the large surface parking lots surrounding the box store. They created a sports center surrounded by a parking structure with multiple stories. In this space, sporting events and tailgating can occur.⁴⁵

While slightly outrageous and tongue-in-cheek about the suburban way of life, LTL brings up many important issues about the building typologies in suburbia today. What they have created is a flexible system that can be scaled for any of the big box stores or warehouses in suburbia. This reimagining of the American suburb changes the relationships in the suburbs between shopping, living, and entertainment or spectacle.

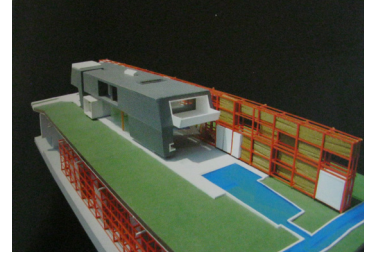


Figure 12. LTL Sectional Model Showing Unit Above Box Store.

Image; *Worlds Away: New Suburban Landscapes*.

Mashpee Commons, Mashpee, MA; Duany, Plater-Zyberk & Co. (DPZ); Keller Moore Architects

Mashpee Commons was one of the first projects in which an architectural firm chose to reclaim a strip mall center in order to create a sense of community in a suburban area. Located on Cape Cod in Massachusetts, Mashpee Commons was a series of strip malls with no discernible center. In 1986, investors bought multiple strip malls in the same area and chose to bring the firm DPZ to create the master plan for a community there by remaking the shopping centers according to New Urbanist principles.⁴⁶

The existing site in 1985 contained a large strip shopping center at the crossroads of several major highways. Where the highways crossed was a large roundabout. There were several apartment complexes, but nothing was connected.⁴⁷

DPZ worked out a unique masterplan, where small liner stores, only 20 feet deep, defined the edges of surface parking lots. These liner stores were developed with the archetypal homes and buildings of the Northeast in mind, using steeply sloped roofs with wooden shingles. This gave the standard homogenous shopping centers a more contemporary regional style. The new Commons was widely appreciated and has led to discussions of incorporation of Mashpee Commons

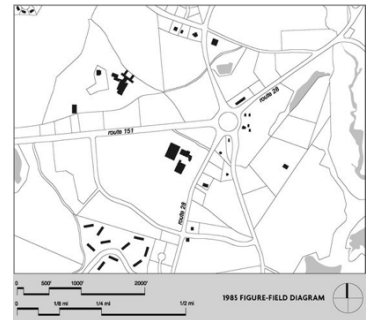


Figure 13. Original figure ground plan, 1985.

Image; *Retrofitting Suburbia*, Kindle Edition, location 2995.



Figure 14. Shallow liner stores at Mashpee Commons.

Image; *Retrofitting Suburbia*, Kindle Edition, location 3010.

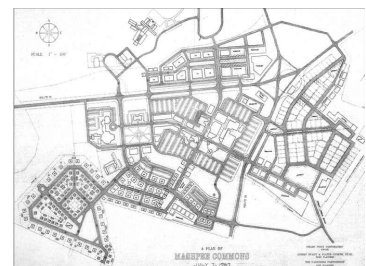


Figure 15. Original DPZ Masterplan, 1987.

Image; *Retrofitting Suburbia*, Kindle Edition, location 3010.

as its own town.⁴⁸

In 2002, DPZ worked with the residents of Mashpee Commons again to help define some of the spaces that had not developed in the way expected. A new form-based code for the Commons that was developed in this process. The document follows some of DPZs established ideas concerning the transect, which a strategy developed by Duany and Plater-Zyberk meant to do away with the nomenclature of rural, suburban, and urban, replacing them with a more nuanced set of zones that allow more flexibility and interaction between them.⁴⁹ DPZ also composed of a set of form-based codes in the creation of Mashpee Commons. There were five documents meant to be used together: regulating plan, urban standards, architectural standards, thoroughfare standards, and landscape standards.⁵⁰ They have laid out with the town how development will occur for the next 20 years.

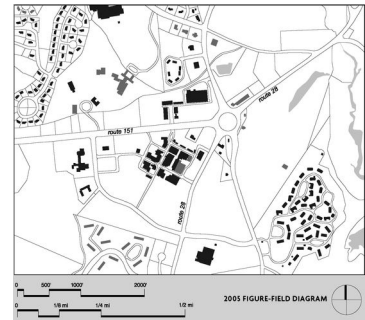


Figure 16. Development progress 2005.

Image; *Retrofitting Suburbia*, Kindle Edition, location 3010.

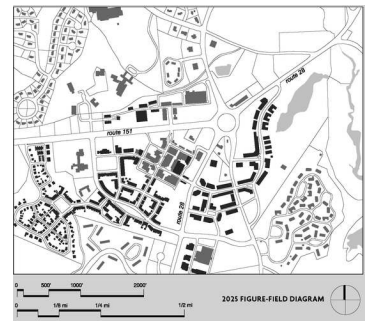


Figure 17. Projected development Mashpee Commons, 2025.

Image; *Retrofitting Suburbia*, Kindle Edition, location 2995.

Lesson Learned

Each of these projects focuses on an issue that is at the heart of the consumerist mentality in American suburbia. In the 100 Oaks example in Nashville, Gresham Smith showed a way in which a very public program, a university hospital, can be contained within the mall building. LTL held a more theoretical, almost whimsical approach to the rooftop landscape of big box stores. At Mashpee Commons, DPZ created a community in a place that would otherwise have developed as the standard big box store model prevalent today. All of the projects create a solution for a fundamental lack in these suburban spaces, a lack of public space for interaction.

If sprawl is the logical conclusion for the consumerist attitude, then what is the corresponding expression in the built environment relating to *civitas*? There has been a traditional element in the city where the interaction vital to the virtue of *civitas* has been planned for and encouraged. For the ancient Romans, this space was the Forum, although similar spaces have existed in almost every culture in recorded history. In the Forum, many different spheres of daily life met in the same space, including the civic, the commercial, and the religious. It was also a landmark in the city of Rome, where Roman citizens came and interacted on a daily basis.

In most cities today, there are still spaces that reflect the significance of the forum. These spaces are open, public spaces with well-defined boundaries. In the city, these spaces are contained within the block structure of the city streets. Usually they are close to the heart of the city's downtown, making them easily accessible and walkable. Similar to the Roman Forum, different spheres of human life, including the civic and the commercial, meet and interact in these spaces.

Knoxville also has some of these spaces that carry the significance of the Forum. One of these Forum-like spaces is Market Square. Market Square provides a very open and public space, where many people can meet and interact. It is essentially connected

to the commercial buildings that surround it, but its significance goes well beyond the commercial realm. Public and cultural events are held in the square, and the visitors to the square interact with residents on a regular basis. World's Fair Park is another space in the city that functions in a similar way to the Forum. From the 1982 World's Fair, Knoxville now has a recognizable landmark in the form of the Sunsphere. The Foundry, the Knoxville Museum of Art, the Knoxville Convention Center, the Chocolate Factory and other amenities are all in close walking distance to the World's Fair grounds. The auditorium and the lawn provide spaces for public events and interaction.

The contemporary American suburb rarely holds these significant spaces, and the lack of spaces where this interaction can occur is detrimental in the promotion of *civitas* in suburbia. As an important and influential space where all of these activities can occur, I feel the Forum is the place found in the city that can reconnect and engage these activities in the suburban environment.

CHAPTER 2

KNOXVILLE HISTORY AND SITE

Knoxville

Like many cities in America, Knoxville started close to water as a source of nourishment and transportation. Knoxville was founded as a fort on the Tennessee River in 1791.⁵¹ In 1794, the University of Tennessee was established as Blount College, later moving to a site just west of the city in 1826, its current setting.⁵² The town received an influx of population prior to the Civil War with the arrival of the railroad, and then another growth in population after the war, when wealthy Northern investors settled in Knoxville.⁵³

At the turn of the twentieth century, manufacturing and the factories to the north of the city caused a move from many residents of Knoxville to newly created ring suburbs around the downtown area, including the area which is now known as Sequoiah Hills.⁵⁴

In order to reach these suburban neighborhoods, Knoxville had an extensive trolley-car system, which ran outwards to the edges of these developments.⁵⁵ The road that ran along with the street-car to Sequoiah Hills is called Kingston Pike.

Between 1940 and 1950, the Knoxville News-Sentinel reported that an alarming rate of younger Knoxvilleans were leaving the city for surrounding towns

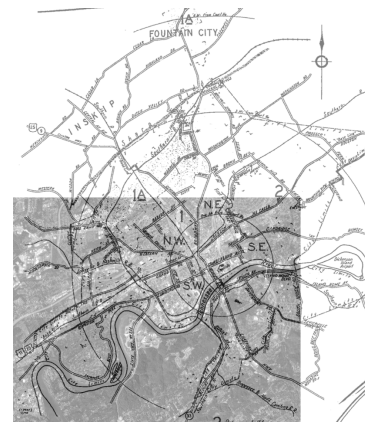


Figure 18. Knoxville Trolley system in 1917 overlaid on current Knoxville Map

Trolley Map from Sanborn Maps UTK Library, Underlay Google Maps

and suburban areas in Knox County. This move was caused by several factors, including the dirtiness of the city of Knoxville, the growth of Oak Ridge and other cities around Knoxville, and the fact that the city of Knoxville was not able to handle the multitude of problems in the postwar city.⁵⁶ In the midst of the Second Red Scare in the U.S., the University of Tennessee became vulnerable to accusations from different sources in the Knoxville area, and distanced itself from the city of Knoxville, preferring instead to cater to the wishes of the state government in order to receive financial support.⁵⁷

The interstate and the continued growth of suburban neighborhoods beyond the city limits led Knoxville to annex more areas in the 1970s, including Bearden and West Hills.⁵⁸ With the growth and shift of focus of the University and the suburbs beyond Sequoia Hills, along with the addition of the interstate through Knoxville, much of the recent growth in Knoxville has moved in a westward pattern along Kingston Pike. This growth led me to focus on the more suburban western portion of Kingston Pike as the base for my research.

Kingston Pike

Kingston Pike is representative in the city of Knoxville of westward expansion of the city limits and its suburbs. It is also a place where sprawl is practiced in almost every building and development. In analyzing Knoxville, the east to west corridor is a place where much growth is occurring because many have chosen to live in the suburban neighborhoods in the western part of Knoxville.

In spite of this great growth, this western portion of Kingston Pike is a “dead street” according to the guidelines described by Jane Jacobs to determine a healthy street. There is no public life along the street. Sidewalks, when present, are inadequate and frightening for the public to follow. The automobile traffic is directed to move at speeds between 35 and 45 miles per hour. Sidewalks are infrequent, discouraging biking or walking along the highway. Stores are located along the highway, but are at distances

apart from each other and across the busy highway from each other so that walking is nearly impossible. These stores are also set back from the street front so that they are not truly connected to the street front as they would be in a town or city setting.

Although it is technically a “dead street” in Jacobs’ terms, it is not that there is no activity along Kingston Pike. Through study of the highway, I identified certain nodes along the corridor that do have commercial activity occurring within the site. These tend to be sites where there is access to the interstate and where box store retail activity has become more concentrated, such as Cedar Bluff or Pellissippi Parkway. These sites are spread out along the length of Kingston Pike, at distances that make walking between these sites impractical. This portion of the Kingston Pike corridor is dominated by automobile centered strip malls, shopping centers, consisting of mainly big box stores, smaller stand-alone stores, and drive-through fast food restaurants.

Each of these nodes has some residential density nearby, usually pushed behind the box store or shopping center. The relative density of residential developments and the



Figure 19. Nodes of activity along Kingston Pike.

Images from Google Maps taken March 10, 2013; diagram created in Photoshop by author.

proximity to the arterial roads such as Kingston Pike and the interstate, make these areas unique sites for change and redevelopment.

West Town Mall

At the center of these nodes, and one of the largest single use sites along Kingston Pike, is West Town Mall. The mall is a massive enclosed building which is, in size, comparable to all of Downtown Knoxville, as seen in Figure 20, but without a permanent population base. The property is also large-scale, and does not relate to the surrounding neighborhoods and homes. Blank, windowless facades, as seen in Figure 21, are occasionally broken by a glazed entrance. This is the manner in which the mall addresses the street and the surrounding neighborhood.

West Town Mall is a conglomeration of many different stores, many of which seem to have been built as additions in a haphazard manner. Bordering the site are two larger arterial roads, Kingston Pike to the north, Morrell Road to the East. Ray Mears Blvd. also intersects with the site, and serves as an important connection between West Town and Downtown West, another intersection of shopping and activity in the area. With its large size and isolation from the neighborhoods behind it, I chose the mall as the site to introduce the typology of the forum in order to promote interaction between the

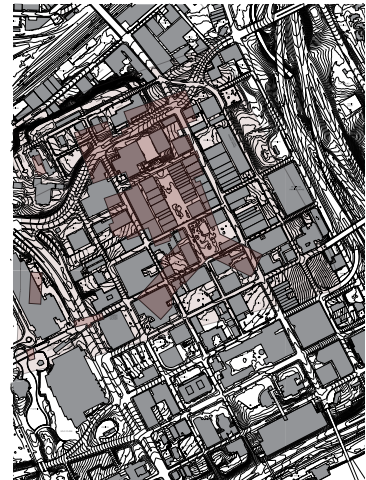


Figure 20. West Town Mall Relative size to Downtown Knoxville.

Source KGIS Diagram by author



Figure 21. West Town Mall view from across Kingston Pike

Photograph taken by author.

site and the surrounding neighborhoods, and provide for *civitas* to occur in the suburban community around West Town.

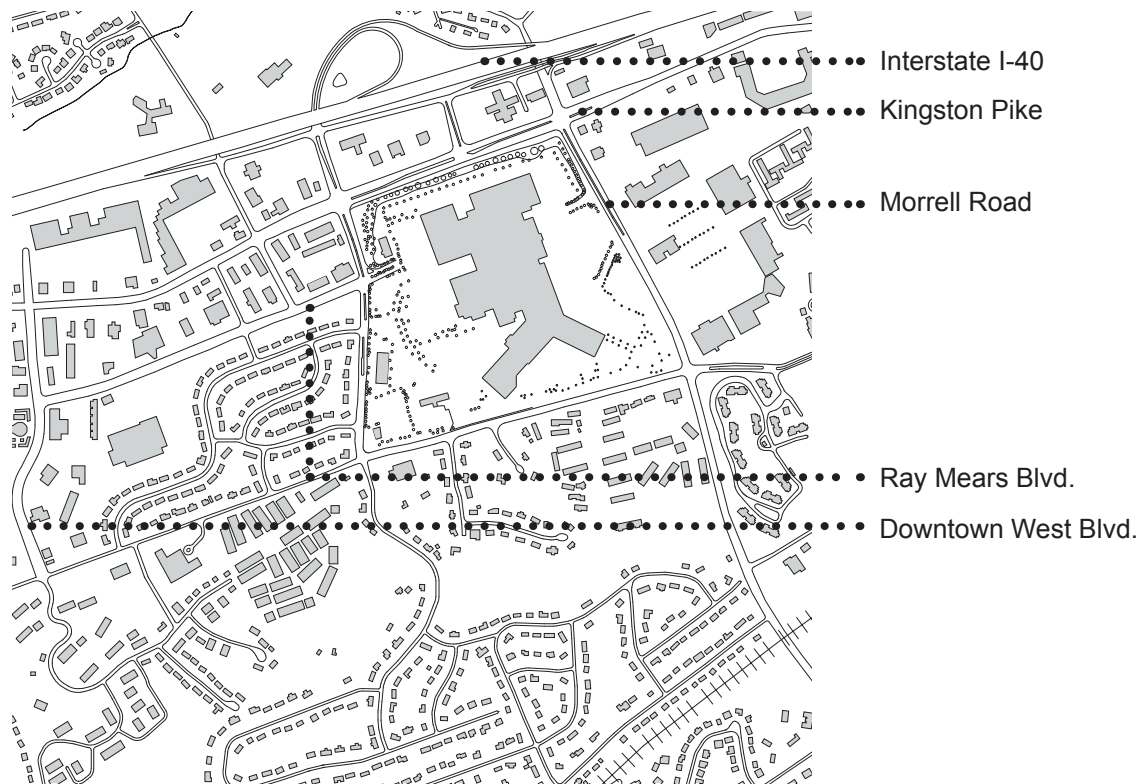


Figure 22. West Town Mall existing plan view.

Plan created in AutoCAD from KGIS Maps

CHAPTER 3

Design Proposal

The Street: On the larger scale of Kingston Pike, the highway is dominated by the box stores and strip shopping centers. I propose that the nodes along the highway which were previously identified as centers of activity become connected through a more extensive transit system than currently exists. At each of the nodes, the sites receive added density and will connect better to the surrounding neighborhoods. If this is accomplished, the surrounding retail in the form of big box stores can relocate to these sites and add to the density. In between the nodes, Kingston Pike will lose the scattered shopping centers of box stores. Perhaps Kingston Pike, with its numerous strip malls can become more like a large tree-lined boulevard, where these nodes can become transit hubs and people will feel safer and more confident walking or biking from node to node.

Masterplan: The existing West Town site does little to connect to the spaces around it. Instead of addressing the streets surrounding it, the mall occupies the center of the site. Between the mall and the streets are surface parking lots, sometimes spanning up to 600 feet from the edge of the mall to the street.

While studying the surrounding spaces, I noticed a pattern of growth that moves in a gradient away from Kingston Pike. Closer to the highway are the sites that have a higher intensity of people in a day, mainly commercial buildings in strip centers. The neighborhood beyond these commercial spaces has a gradient of its own. The housing close to the commercial space is generally considered less desirable: apartment complexes and smaller businesses. After this, the neighborhood changes in scale to be mainly single-family detached residences. At West Town, this housing gradient also occurs when moving from east to west. From the east, closer to the next shopping center, the neighborhood is denser and includes mainly apartments. Towards the west, and close to Downtown West Blvd., the housing is predominantly single family residences. The mall currently interrupts

this gradient of housing.

I propose to transform the site with each of these issues in mind. The design for the site is based on the following goals: to keep a portion of the mall, restructuring it based on vertical circulation cores, and building on the roof of the mall; to design for the integration of a Forum, including the introduction of civic and public spaces to the site; the creation of Civic buildings consisting of a Public Event Center and a Public Services Building; the creation of Mixed Used Commercial buildings to address the street; landscaping; underground parking; and housing that completes the housing gradient previously mentioned.

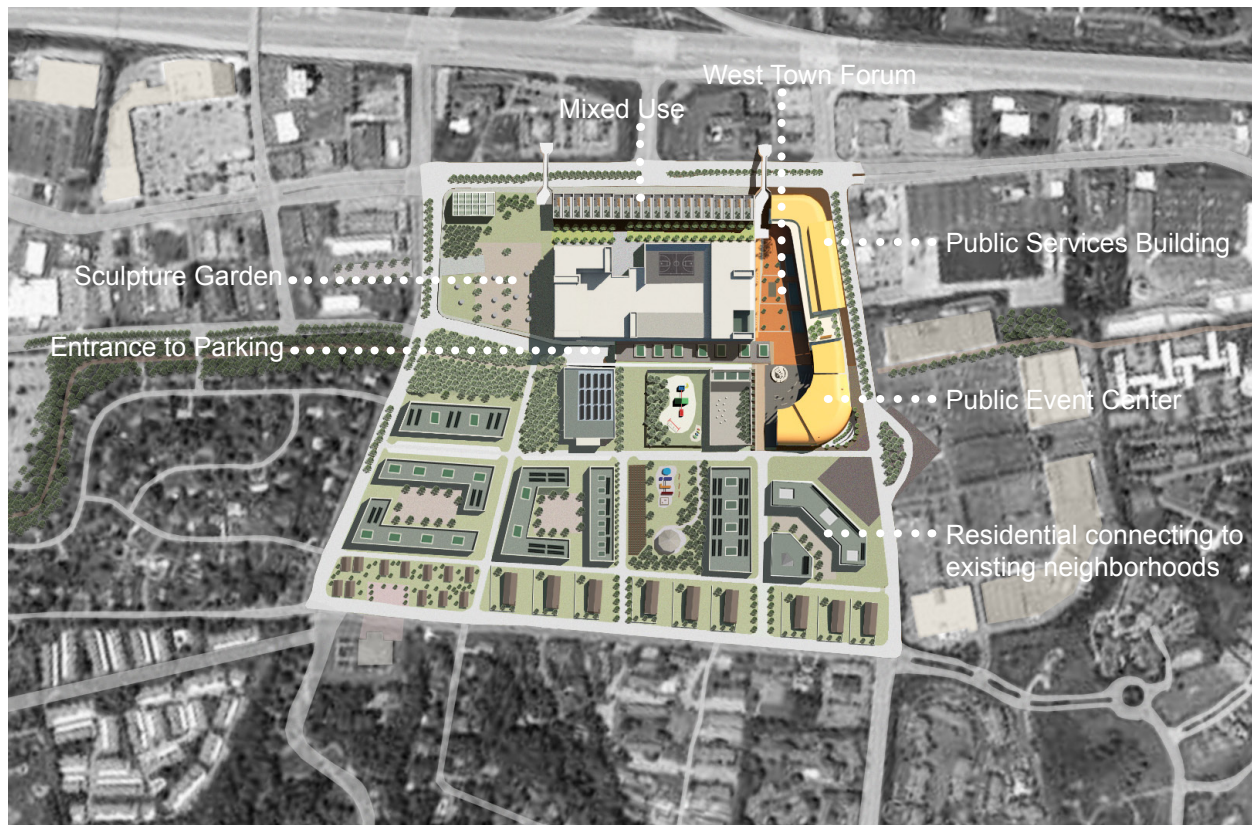


Figure 23. West Town Masterplan.

Plan created in Revit, overlaid on image from Google Earth in Photoshop.

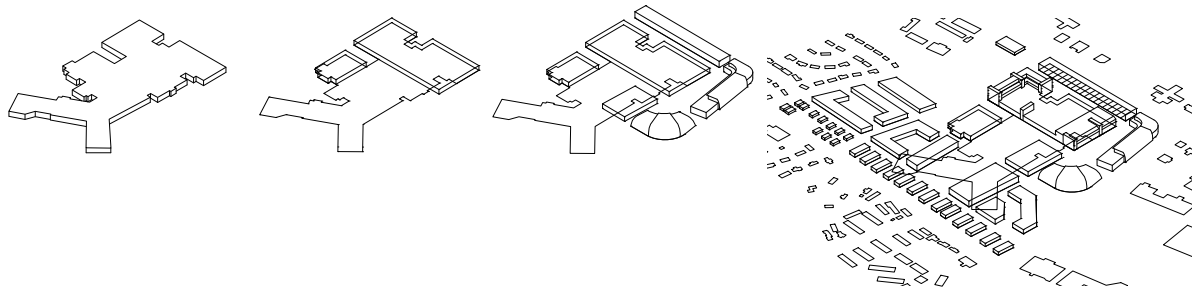


Figure 24. Transformation from existing to proposed.

Diagram created by author in AutoCAD and Adobe Illustrator

West Town Forum: The proposed West Town Forum would function in a similar manner to the Roman Forum, drawing together the commercial (represented by the Mall) and the civic in a public space that promotes public use and interaction. Within West Town Forum, trees will provide shade, fixed and moveable seating will be provided, and a splash pad and a sculpture that can be occupied by both children and adults serve as focal points for activity.

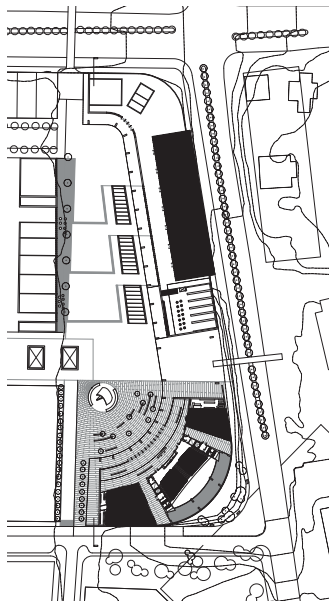


Figure 25. Plan of West Town Forum

Diagram created by author in AutoCAD



Figure 26. View of West Town Forum

Created by author in Revit and Photoshop

Civic Buildings: The civic program is distributed between two buildings that serve different functions. In the building to the north, many of the public services normally found only in the downtown of a city would be made available to the residents of the suburbs. These services include a courtroom, licensing services, a library, and other offices, which, for the most part, residents of the suburbs have to drive downtown to find. The southern building is the Public Event Center, based on the model of a Civic Center. In the Public Event Center, there will be an auditorium, classrooms and administrative offices, a ball-room with an event kitchen, a lounge, and a gallery to display works from local artists. This proposed event center would provide a space for gathering and celebration that is found in most downtowns, but is lacking in American suburbia.



Figure 27. Gallery in Public Event Center

Created by author in Revit and Photoshop



Figure 28. Balcony in front of Lounge in Public Event Center

Created by author in Revit and Photoshop

The Mall: The existing mall is now disconnected from the surrounding homes and properties. Its immense size makes it impossible for the Mall to relate to the size and scale of the buildings and homes around it. Because of this, I propose to deconstruct a portion of the mall building, and keep the northern section of the building. Within the building, the circulation would be changed to adjust for the newer, smaller, and more walkable version of the mall. Another goal with the design of the mall building was to achieve a higher density of the existing mall building. Two floors of retail would be kept in the reorganized scheme, and the existing structure would be reoriented to new vertical circulation cores. This will allow a restructuring of the roof to make the space above inhabitable. Above the proposed mall roof, there are two zones, a public zone and a private zone. New structures are planned along the edges of each of these zones. On the western side of the mall, the structure is more private, and contains offices on the first two levels and high-end apartments above the offices. The common area on the private side of the mall roof serves as the “lawn” for the residents. On the eastern portion of the mall addressing the Forum, I propose to relocate the cinema which is currently located in the portion of the mall that would be dismantled by my intervention. Also in the public zone on the roof would be an area for recreation, including outdoor basketball courts, and an area that is more for relaxation, with moveable seating and trees for shade.

The purpose of these proposed changes is not the destruction of the mall. In this scheme it would still be central to the site and the proposed density that would be added. Through the proposed additions to the existing mall, it is my hope that the present day mall, which is part of the overall sprawl along Kingston Pike, can become the center for the rehabilitation of the highway .

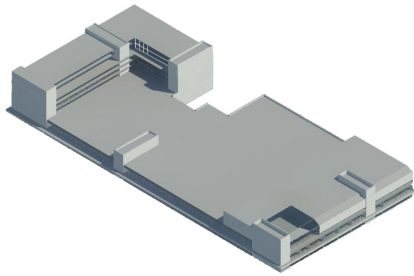


Figure 29. Axonometric drawing of Roof of Mall

Created by author in Revit



Figure 30. Roof of Mall Building

Created by author in Revit and Photoshop

Mixed Use Commercial: There were many design considerations when approaching this site and transforming it. The proposed design begins with Kingston Pike; this is vital to change Kingston Pike from a “dead street” to a more vibrant street that is walkable and connects to the community surrounding it. In the design, a strip of mixed use buildings bridge the distance between the mall and the street. The lower two floors are retail oriented, while above these levels there would be leasable office and apartment space. Between the building of the mall that is retained and the addition of these mixed-use commercial buildings, there is enough space to house most of the retail currently held within West Town Mall. These proposed buildings have open glass facades facing both Kingston Pike and the mall so that the important connection is made between the mall and the street. The mall building is further connected to these infill buildings by a pedestrian mall that will draw people from the west side of the site into West Town Forum.



Figure 31. Pedestrian Mall between West Town Mall and infill commercial buildings

Created by author in Revit and Photoshop

Housing: In order to make a connection between the mall and the surrounding neighborhoods, the proposed project needs to have a transition that brings the scale of the mall down to the scale of the apartments and homes surrounding it. Following the existing gradient of the site, this housing would move from higher density apartments closer to the mall, to duplexes and single family residences at the southern end of the site. The site would also be gridded in a block structure that helps it merge with the surrounding neighborhoods and draw these homes into the site. These changes would make a connection and promotes a community in which *civitas* can flourish.

Education: Connected to the civic program integrated into the forum, I propose to provide for some of the education needs within the community. There would be an elementary school for the children who live in this community and the surrounding neighborhoods. The school is located south of the mall, and would help to define an entrance to the forum along with the Public Event Center.

Parking and Landscape: The existing site is dominated by the fields of surface parking surrounding West Town Mall. My design intention was to minimize this so that walking, biking, and public transit became the more dominant means of access into the site. In

order to accomplish this, I propose to place the parking for the site underneath West Town Forum. The skylights over the deconstructed portion of the mall would be moved into the landscape as a feature with fixed seating around it, where they would serve a dual purpose. These skylights pierce through into the path that the car takes to go underground into the parking area. They provide a rhythm and some natural light for visitors parking below. In addition to the underground parking, a smaller portion of the mall would be retained for a parking tower. This building currently has some parking program within it, which I propose to expand. The upper floors would be reserved for a gym that services the community. Parking in this garage would be reserved for handicapped residents or visitors and parking for the elementary school during a school day.

The landscape of the site is augmented by several new amenities. To the west of the site, south of Ray Mears Blvd., there is a smaller neighborhood lined with trees that separate the neighborhood from the boulevard. In this space, a greenway path would be created that will connect the surrounding neighborhoods to the spaces around. The greenway will go all the way to Downtown West Blvd. to the west of the site, and will cross the proposed site, moving through the forum and connecting beyond the site. This would be a continuous greenway that would connect all along Kingston Pike, uniting the scattered neighborhoods along the way.

At the northwest corner of the site, I propose a greenhouse conservatory, that would connect with a new plaza created on the site. In this space, the residents of the community could come to see the process of growing plants that would not otherwise survive in the climate of Tennessee. The connecting plaza would contain sculptures by local artists, as well as some kinetic sculptures that will move with the wind, providing visual interest and drawing people further into the site. Among the apartments, there would also be a community park, which will have space for a community garden, a gazebo for meeting space and public interaction, and a playground for the children of the community.

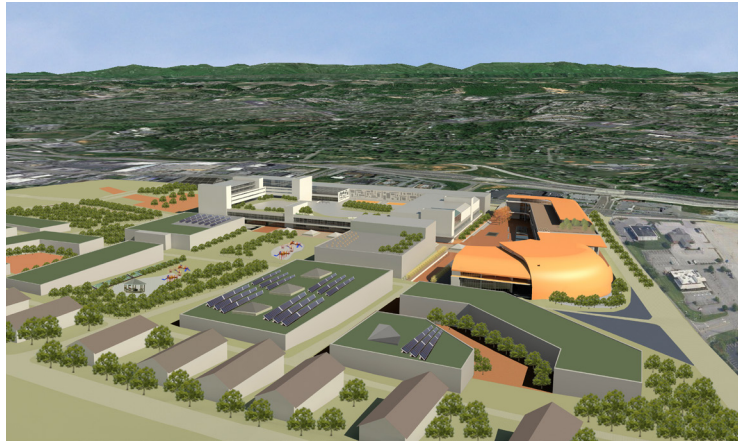


Figure 32. Bird's Eye View of the site showing the connection between the higher density mall and the lower density residences.

Created by author in Revit and Photoshop

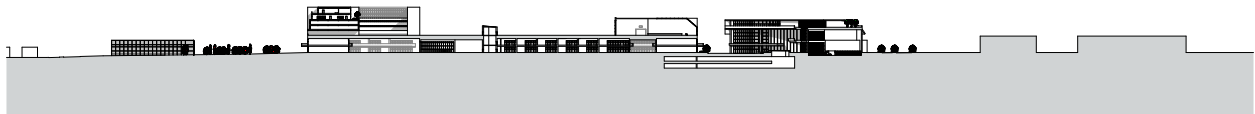


Figure 33. Transverse Site Section showing the underground parking (center) and the greenhouse conservatory (left).

Created by author in AutoCAD and Adobe Illustrator

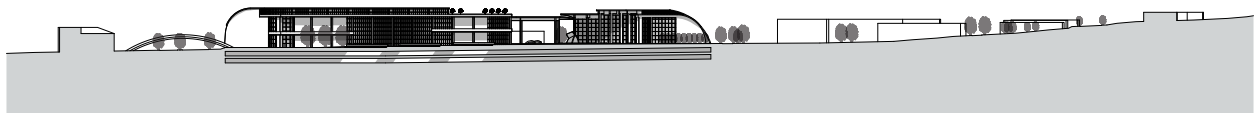


Figure 34. Longitudinal Site Section through West Town Forum showing the apartments and housing beyond (right), and the connections made to other sites (left).

Created by author in AutoCAD and Adobe Illustrator

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

This was a large and complex project, and I do not feel that the issue can be fully understood or developed in the short time given to prepare this thesis. In approaching this project, I tried to address both the neighborhoods and the commercial buildings in a way that was sensitive to the needs of both owners of the homes and the retail spaces. Unlike many contemporary projects, my ultimate goal was not to eliminate the mall. This is a type of retail that is widely recognized and loved by many people. Instead, I wanted to reexamine the typology of the suburban shopping mall and its surrounding context, and find ways to adapt this retail typology to be more incorporated into the community.

In order to create this dialogue between the neighborhoods and the commercial spaces, it was essential to view the wider context. Changes in the manner that I have proposed cannot be made to a site like West Town Mall without reciprocal changes in the communities and retail spaces adjacent to the mall and along the street. One thing that would make this project lose its meaning is if it was implemented as a case of isolated renewal to a single site, and not as a part of a network of changes all along the highway, as it was designed to be. Many retail chains and box store developers would need to fundamentally alter their business practices in order for changes of this scale to occur.

Some of the assumptions I had made coming into the project turned out to be wrong. I had hoped to reduce the insular nature of the mall in order to connect it with the community. In the end my project reduced the isolation somewhat, but the focus on density and connecting to the streets makes the mall and the other larger scale buildings I created a little like an urban island in the midst of their suburban surroundings. This is not necessarily a bad thing, or detrimental to the thesis. I feel that the shopping mall has always been insular, an isolated object in the middle of the site. The mall would still

function as a destination spot for commercial purposes as it has done from its inception. The added focus on public spaces for recreation and interaction, as well as the new civic function of the site will make it more than just a place for consumers to park and shop. The new scheme would draw in the residents from surrounding neighborhoods and allow them to engage the site in a manner that will build a stronger sense of community.

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