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Neighborhood-friendly developments are changing America's urban and suburban landscapes

| By Debra Prinzing





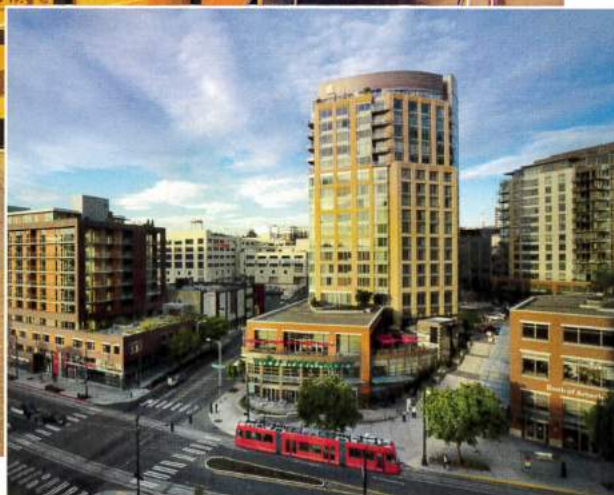
The mall may be an American archetype, but conventional shopping centers have been changing for more than a decade.

Today's most successful developments reflect consumers' desires for a unique mix of commercial tenants and venues that offer light-filled open gathering places. For communities around the country, this modern notion of a "mixed-use" project offers a refreshing alternative to business as usual.

Some developments are built from the ground up, but most involve a creative combination of upgrades to existing buildings along with high-density new construction, and some of the most appealing projects are zoned for retail, restaurant and office use, as well as including housing. At their essence, says real estate analyst Ed McMahon, a senior resident fellow at the Urban Land Institute based in Washington, D.C., these projects are human-scaled, neighborhood-focused places designed for the people who live and work in them. The most successful of these efforts hark back to the old-fashioned town square but have a modern vibe for today's lifestyle.

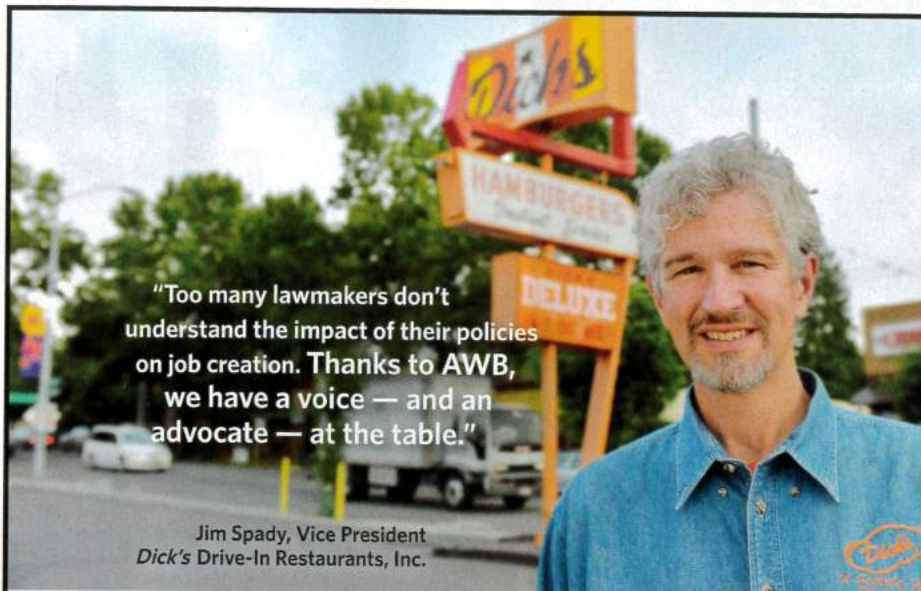
"It's actually an ancient concept—think of the vibrant, active streetscapes of old Italian villages," says Darryl Custer, AIA, a principal of Seattle-based Callison. "The ground floors of most buildings were dedicated to cafes, shops—places people used in their daily lives. And the owners often lived above their shops."

The 21st century version of the traditional village is changing the fabric of downtowns and suburbs, connecting people with services, art,



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The redevelopment of Seattle's South Lake Union neighborhood created a vibrant and accessible neighborhood of restaurants, shops, offices and apartments.



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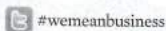
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the neighborhood's appeal for business owners and residents.

San Marcos, California: North City

Increasingly, savvy property owners and suburban community planners are fostering redevelopment that gives residents their own Main Street.

In 2004, developer Gary Levitt and his partner Michael McDonald, founders of Urban Villages San Marcos, started a 150-acre land assembly zoned for a business park in San Marcos, a north San Diego County college town located about 10 miles inland from the coast and 30 miles north of San Diego.

"We started talking with the city, and it became apparent that they had a vision," Levitt says. "In most other cities where I've worked, when you go in to talk about a plan, you're just told: 'Here's the zoning.'"

San Marcos was different, he says. "They had attracted California State University San Marcos, one of California's fastest-growing universities. It changed the dynamic of the neighborhood and was a fantastic stimulant."

The city's population is fewer than 100,000 residents, although the student population at Cal State San Marcos and nearby Palomar Community College makes for a unique, ever-changing, younger demographic. Direct commuter access via the Sprinter light rail line, which connects San Marcos to the Coaster line, was also a big benefit, Levitt says. "Rail allowed us to start looking at a much denser, mixed-use development—a sustainable, walkable place."

Called North City, the development was recently rezoned (along with an adjacent 50-acre parcel) as a series of mixed-use "urban nodes" for housing, offices, shops, restaurants and open community space.

The first phase of North City was recently completed: a housing facility to accommodate 600 students. Cal State San Marcos treats the buildings as on-campus housing, while North City manages them to university standards. "They've suddenly

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doubled the number of beds they can offer to students, and it's 100 percent rented," Levitt says. He hopes new infrastructure will attract other homebuilders to add up to 3,000 residential and multifamily housing units to the area.

The developers and the city are taking a nontraditional approach to retail, similar to what's taking place in Seattle's South Lake Union. There are plans for more than one million square feet of retail, entertainment and office space.

According to project designers Ricardo Rabines and Taal Safdie of San Diego-based Safdie Rabines Architects, the challenge is to serve members of the community as well as create an attractive destination that draws from outside the region.

"The trend is to make suburban areas much more urban, with all the activities you expect from a city," Rabines says, noting that consumers already have an array of retail options. "What people do need, though, are places to gather, socialize and celebrate."

One answer is to populate North City with desirable restaurants, independent retailers and a special niche: microbreweries. "This area has seen a boom in microbreweries, and we hope to attract several to the project," Rabines adds.

Emeryville, California: Public Market

With historic buildings dating to 1870, the Public Market in Emeryville has been many things to this East Bay community. From its industrial past, the area has evolved over the years, including being redeveloped as a shopping center and food court in the mid-1980s.

But following the huge growth of technology-focused businesses, a group of developers are reimagining the Public Market as Emeryville's new town square—14 acres in one of the country's most populated urban centers.

"Emeryville is now the hub for creative classes, including in the arts and technology," says Mark Stefan, principal of San Francisco-based City Center Realty Partners LLC, which is redeveloping the property. "This community is the home of



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