

APPENDIX B
DESIGNING THE SUCCESSFUL DOWNTOWN

Designing the Successful Downtown



the Urban Land Institute

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Principles for Developing the Downtown Market

The term “downtown market” as used here embraces the fullest possible range of human transactions, from the simple buying and selling of goods and services to providing people with the widest spectrum of satisfying experiences. An inventory of the space uses of a successful downtown would reveal a surprising and lengthy list of uses, many of which are not readily apparent.

For example, “retailing” includes all items offered for sale to the general public, from automobiles to eyeglasses, from furniture to flowers. All food service establishments, whether offering food for home consumption or dining out, are classified as retail. So, too, are most banks, travel agencies, barbers, computer and video stores, tanning parlors, and news vendors.

The term “offices” covers an equally wide range of activities. Most of the office space in America is occupied by relatively small organizations. In addition to law firms and large corporations, office users include architects, advertising agencies, manufacturers’ representatives, brokers, consultants and a host of specialists, advisors, and small businesses of every description. City, county, state, and federal government agencies are major users of downtown office space as are a variety of nonprofit organizations and associations. Health care services also include a large number of uses, from hospitals to clinics to therapists, doctors, dentists, teachers, and the network of suppliers who serve them.

The hospitality industry (hotels, motels, inns, bed and breakfast establishments, etc.), entertainment (movies, theaters, concert halls, clubs, etc.), and culture add other categories to the mix of uses in the satisfying downtown. In addition, many small- and medium-sized cities enjoy an institutional base in or near downtown. Colleges, universities, museums, and religious institutions provide support and vitality for the downtown market.

Housing, from efficiency apartments to large townhouses, is a vital component. Successful downtowns invariably include a strong and diverse residential offering.

Developing any of these uses takes energy and direction. While many cities have organizations charged with industrial and job development, little or no direct or indirect support is given to recruiting the small, individual merchants and operators who add significantly to the life of downtown. Those cities with the most successful redevelopments have assumed strong leadership in packaging development proposals that are both attractive to reputable developers and guaranteed to include uses important to revitalization.

Seven basic principles for small- and medium-sized cities reshaping the space-use composition and economic vitality of their downtowns should be observed:

1. Promote diversity of use
2. Emphasize compactness
3. Foster intensity
4. Ensure balance
5. Provide for accessibility
6. Create functional linkages
7. Build a positive identity

Principle #1: Promote Diversity of Use

The essence of downtown is diversity, with a range of choice in things to do and see, drawing people throughout the day and evening. The basic objective in revitalizing the downtown economy is to attract more people more frequently and hold them for as long as possible by creating a variety of reasons to come and to stay downtown.

Diversity means more than one or two primary uses within downtown or on a given street. To be an economically healthy, self-sustaining market, downtown must include office, residential, and entertainment func-

Entertainment and cultural activities and outdoor cafes add vitality to downtown's streets.



- *Hotels* are supported by offices, convention and exhibit centers, and cultural attractions; in turn, they provide entertainment, eating and drinking establishments, retail shops, and meeting spaces.
- *Housing* adds to downtown's attractiveness as an office and shopping location, provides important support for retailing, and capitalizes on cultural and entertainment attractions.
- *Culture, entertainment, and recreation* act as activity generators and visitor attractions and are supported by residents, office workers, and hotel patrons.
- *Special events and activity programming* are also important parts of the strategy for creating downtown attractions. Seasonal vendors, outdoor exhibits, flower and produce markets, concerts and festivals provide a changing roster of events that draw people downtown. They can be aimed at local interests or can be geared as regional tourist attractions. In either case, an organization must be developed to coordinate special events planning. Appropriately designed public spaces must be provided. A mix of downtown uses operating in a mutually supportive fashion is essential in establishing a lively social environment and a profitable business setting.

Special events such as outdoor exhibits, concerts, farmers' markets, or ethnic festivals draw people downtown.



tions in addition to retail shops and restaurants. Moreover, these uses must be effectively linked together.

Each of the components in downtown's mix helps create markets and provide support services for other components. The objective is to take maximum advantage of the potential for market synergy by encouraging a balance of functions linked by patterns of pedestrian movement. For example:

- *Offices* need and support restaurants, shops, personal and business services, hotels and meeting spaces, and in-town housing.
- *Retailing* creates street-level vitality and provides convenience goods and services for office workers, residents, and visitors.

Principle #2: Emphasize Compactness

To promote pedestrian activity and vitality, the downtown area of a small- or medium-sized city should be compact and walkable, with a tight physical structure and an efficient spatial arrangement. Compactness concentrates uses to create a critical mass of activity rather than spreading activity thinly over a broader area.

The first priority is to fill the existing gaps in the urban fabric, especially at high-visibility locations in the retail core. Even relatively small gaps in the continuity of buildings edging the street—created by vacant lots, blank walls, or excessive building setbacks—can significantly interrupt the flow of pedestrians on downtown streets and reduce the integration of uses. If major downtown anchors are too far apart or isolated from one another by surface parking, flows of pe-

pedestrian activity and the potential for economic linkages between uses will be reduced.

Many cities are experiencing a tendency for new higher-density development to locate on the fringe of the core or outside the downtown where land prices are lower and parcels are more easily assembled. Where it is within walking distance of downtown's traditional retail center, peripheral higher-density development is not a problem; in fact, it can channel new activity into the historic retail core. But if people cannot walk between the traditional center and the newly developed activity anchors, the impact on the core will be negative.

Principle #3: Foster Intensity

Development densities should establish downtown as the community's central place. But care is required to ensure that new large-scale projects do not overwhelm downtown's existing character or its market potential. Consideration must also be given to traffic and parking demands to ensure that diversity and continuity of street-level activity can be maintained. In smaller cities, where the density of development is typically lower, care must be taken to concentrate the mix of activities to achieve the critical mass at the heart or core of downtown.

Although the city's tallest buildings and highest development densities are most appropriately concentrated in the downtown area, zoning often permits new construction that is out of scale with the existing pattern of development. Unless special protective measures are taken, overzoning can create pressures to clear older buildings whose architectural character adds to the quality of the downtown. Without appropriate site planning controls and guidelines, a discontinuous pattern of development can occur with high-rise towers surrounded by a sea of surface parking. The downtown plan, development regulations, and the review process must address the manner in which buildings relate to the street and the quality of street-level spaces. Horizontal continuity of development, with buildings framing the street to create a consistent sense of spatial enclosure and to bring shop windows and entrance lobbies adjacent to the pedestrian zone, must be a high priority.



A solid block face provides definition for both residential and commercial streets.



Intensive use need not always mean high-rise construction; many downtowns offer opportunities to intensify use patterns with the addition of appropriately scaled infill development and by encouraging the productive use of upper-story building space (e.g., for offices or housing). One effective strategy for intensifying land use without undermining downtown's sense of human scale is to add taller buildings in the center or rear of a block, stepping the height up gradually and visually breaking up the mass of the new structure.

Downtown should be compact and walkable, with a tight physical structure and an efficient spatial arrangement.

Transitional densities and architectural texture help to integrate new development and preserve human scale.



Well-designed high-density development can express vitality and human scale.



Principle #4: Ensure Balance

While downtown must have a critical mass of activity, overconcentration of any one use should be avoided. Day and evening, as well as weekday and weekend, activity generators should be interspersed to capitalize on the full economic development potential of the multiple-use approach to revitalization.

An overemphasis on offices can leave downtown uninhabited after working hours, making inefficient use of the infrastructure designed to serve peak hour requirements and failing to capture office worker potential to support other downtown uses. Efforts should be made to revamp single-purpose districts by mixing shops and visitor attractions with office uses.

Excessive clustering of major activity generators should also be avoided. Each of these magnets can be used as a strategic anchor that creates development potential along the pathways that interconnect them. But by concentrating these uses in special isolated precincts, the opportunity to maximize their contribution to the downtown revitalization effort can be lost.

Principle #5: Provide for Accessibility

While vehicular access and parking to serve downtown should be convenient and efficient, a clear emphasis on pedestrian use must be established in the downtown core if walking and street activity are to be encour-



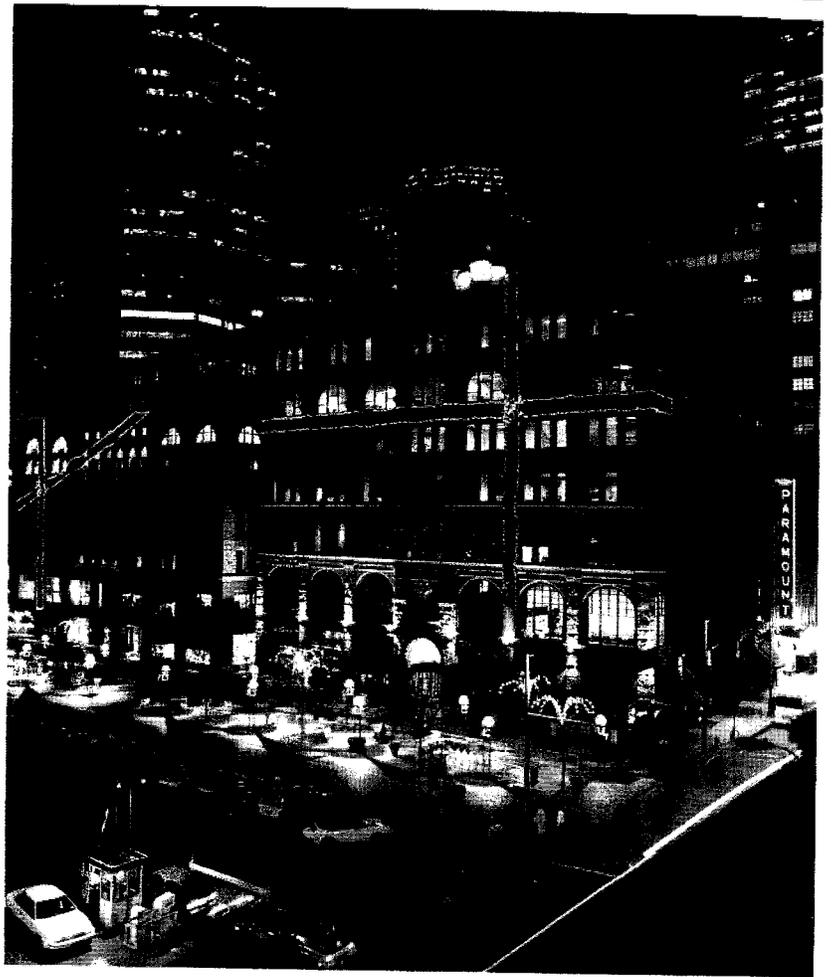
A high-quality streetscape provides amenities for both pedestrians and motorists.

aged. A positive balance between vehicular and pedestrian use of the street must be established. A well defined circulation pattern can ensure efficient vehicular access as well as a quality pedestrian environment. Widened sidewalks and the introduction of amenities designed to enhance the quality and comfort of the pedestrian experience are needed if streets are to serve as links rather than as barriers.

Priority should be given to short-term, shopper-oriented parking to give support to the retail uses located within downtown's core. Increasing demands for all-day commuter parking must be controlled by encouraging the use of public transit, peripheral parking, and car pools. In larger cities with intensive patterns of downtown development, mass transit connections can link activity centers and connect long-term parking on downtown's periphery to the pedestrian core.

Principle #6: Create Functional Linkages

To create market synergy among downtown functions, people must be able to walk between activity centers. Convenient links should be direct, physically attractive, and edged by interesting activity. These pedestrian connections should link the downtown's major anchors and should connect the core area with adjacent neighborhoods. They should form an integrated network defined by distinctive streetscape treatments, open spaces, and active street-level uses.



Evening and weekend activity generators fill important roles in downtown.



Open spaces provide focus and identity for urban neighborhoods.

Private development should be coordinated to avoid barriers to pedestrian movement created by blank walls and parking lots fronting on the street. Transparent ground-floor facades that add interest to the pedestrian environment and through-block connections should be encouraged.



Downtown will have a positive identity if it provides pleasant settings for pedestrian activity.



Principle #7: Build a Positive Identity

To become more marketable as a development location, downtown must have a positive identity and be a pleasant setting for people. Retailing, culture, entertainment, recreation, and special events programming are influential in building a new and attractive image of downtown as an exciting place to be. Housing and the advocacy of in-town residents are also important in shaping downtown's image as a safe, well maintained, stable, and livable environment.

The quality of downtown's physical appearance—its streets, buildings, and open spaces—also plays a critical role in establishing a positive identity. Many smaller cities have qualities of scale and historic character that provide an environment that attracts people. These qualities should be preserved and enhanced in the process of new development.