Public Space as an Anchor in Suburban Commercial Development: 
New Main Streets and Town Centers

by
Laura McLain London

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Signature of Author

Laura McLain London
Department of Urban Studies and Planning
August 14, 1998

Certified by

John P. de Monchaux
Professor of Architecture and Planning
Thesis Supervisor

Accepted by

Paul Smoke
Chairman, MCP Committee
Department of Urban Studies and Planning

Accepted by

William C. Wheaton
Chairman
Interdepartmental Degree Program in Real Estate Development
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Thanks to the doers. I am grateful to those entrepreneurs who have innovated the paradigm -- the public space-anchored, suburban commercial development. Generations of Americans will appreciate your efforts.

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As John would say, Cheers. (I still get to speak Cockney!)
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ABSTRACT

An innovative suburban commercial development strategy is gaining momentum in the 1990s. Its prototype may be called the new Main Street/Town Center (MS/TC). The model reacts to complex economic and social circumstances using a public-space anchored design approach. A major motivation for the trend is the unquantified, but recognizably growing demand for a greater sense of community. This demand may be captured at a profit using a creative development approach, which also appears to generate external environmental and sociological benefits at the margin. Retail industry restructuring is one event triggering the MS/TC's insurgence. Residential uses are found to be a vital addition to commercial ones.

This thesis poses the following questions: What are the circumstances in which a public space-anchored, or street-making, approach is successful in suburban commercial development? As a developer, how would one employ this prototype to capitalize on the applicable market and design circumstances? And, what is the outlook for a public space/street-anchored type of commercial development?

Three case studies -- Downtown Park Forest, IL; Mizner Park, in Boca Raton, FL; and Redmond Town Center in Redmond, WA -- highlight both the constancy and the diversity of the model. MS/TC projects comprise both redevelopment and new development, and are spearheaded by public, public/private, and private development entities.

The new Main Street/Town Center model, which employs mixed uses and varies in scale, is unusual for contemporary suburban development in that it seeks to fortify, or reintegrate, a street network to serve multilateral needs. This audience encompasses autos and pedestrians and sometimes natural ecosystems but does not require connection to mass transit. A comprehensive set of site planning solutions has evolved to address needs of multiple components. There is no singular market context in which the a new Main Street/Town Center model will succeed, but a creative, tailored approach is necessary to optimize financial and social potential.

Thesis Supervisor: John P. de Monchaux
Title: Professor of Architecture and Planning
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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Purpose
The creation of new suburban commercial development is undergoing a sea change as of the late 1990s. After decades of development which has focused primarily on single use properties (retail, office, etc.) there is a new wave of mixed-use property being put into place. This thesis looks at a particular mode of mixed-use development which may be called the “new Main Street”. Other titles for this prototype include Town Center and, less frequently, Lifestyle Center. For convenience, this thesis will use as a shorthand the following acronym to signify the new Main Street/Town Center phenomenon: MS/TC.

This thesis poses the following questions: What are the circumstances in which a public space-anchored, or street-making, approach is successful in suburban commercial development? As a developer, how would one employ this prototype to capitalize on the applicable market and design circumstances? And, what is the prospect for a public space/street-anchored type of commercial development?

The phenomenon is very current and varied. First, the new Main Street/Town Center is a young prototype, with only a handful in existence prior to 1990.¹ There are few, if any, truly and fully matured projects to date. The MS/TC phenomenon therefore comprises mostly projects which are not yet fully built out in all projected phases and have not yet experienced lease roll-over. Yet and second, there are many such projects underway in 1998. One recent count cited between 50 and 100 such projects.² In size the projects range to upward of a million square feet of built space, in addition to open, publicly-accessible space. Third, there is considerable variation in the settings where the MS/TC prototype appears. Potential sponsors may be private profit-seeking entities, public non-profit municipalities, or a combination of the above. Project settings range along a spectrum from new development built from scratch, to redevelopment which adapts properties and/or retrofits sites.
The new Main Street/Town Center model has the following salient characteristics. First, it exists in a suburban locale. It is not found in either a downtown locale of a major metropolitan area, or in the main street of a small town beyond the metropolis. Second, it consists of mixed uses: it supports a complementary program of retail, entertainment, office, hotel, civic, and/or residential uses. Third, the street and block pattern is connective or restorative of street tissue, relative to conventional suburban patterns. Though the true extent of integration with an existing street network varies from project to project, the MS/TC model has a concerted pedestrian orientation which contrasts with archtypical suburban automobile orientation. Fourth, the MS/TC is developed within the framework of a master plan, rather than organically. This element of control relates vitally to real estate aspects such as marketing and leasing, property management, financing, and legal entity (deal structuring/ownership). Fifth, the MS/TC is not specific to any given region within the United States. Well-known examples exist throughout the country including the northwest, southwest, midwest, mid-atlantic, and southern regions. Sixth, public space plays the lead role as anchor. An open plaza or streetscape is the component which supplies value to the other parts of the development, be they retail, entertainment, office, hotel, civic or residential. The public space garners no revenue (and in fact generates costs) to the development’s kitty, yet cultivates beneficial spending traffic. The value of this traffic is easiest to understand for retail and entertainment. Yet, the presence of amenities which draws pedestrian also seems to create value for office, hotel and residential investments.

Within a context of regional variety, the MS/TC paradigm may eventually age best in certain types of metropolitan domains. These include high-growth areas (e.g. Seattle), where rapid development may strongly affect perceived quality of life, and warm-weather areas (e.g. south Florida), where open space is climatically appealing year round. Slower growth regions are also playing host to the phenomenon, as witnessed at Park Forest, IL. Few if any MS/TC developments are in cold winter regions, with the exception of Mashpee Commons, MA, a village on touristic Cape Cod. In the current, late 1990’s phase of this prototype’s development, the deal-making effect of meteoric affluence -- such as that characterizing case study locale Redmond, WA -- is not necessarily a critical indicator. It is too early to reflect with certainty whether or how particular economic or climatic considerations affect financial success of the MS/TC type of development.

The MS/TC phenomenon has been covered frequently, but at a modest level of depth, in recent press, including both newspaper and journal articles. Background research for this thesis un-
covered a great number of very recent studies dating mainly from the mid-1990's through 1998. A quick survey of the titles of such articles illuminates the development trend as portrayed in the circles of planning, architecture and real estate. Such titles include, "Putting the Urb Back in Suburbs" from Planning\textsuperscript{3} and "Putting the Community Back into Community Retail," from Urban Land,\textsuperscript{4} imply a restorative quality in public space oriented suburban development. Article titles also illustrate the widening of the trend from narrow retail roots to broader developmental relevance. For example, the journal Architectural Record published in 1993 a study called "Reworking the Mall;"\textsuperscript{5} its counterpart five years later was "Main Street Goes Suburban."\textsuperscript{6} Yet, apparently no scholarly studies to date have addressed the phenomenon with regard to both urban design and real estate perspectives.

\textbf{Methodology and Structure}

This thesis employs a case study methodology, for the following reasons. First, the fact of the MS/TC as a rapidly evolving phenomenon suggests that it is beneficial for study via a snapshot in time (1998). Next, it is difficult or impossible to obtain comprehensive longitudinal real estate performance data for these projects, since some are still in build-out. Though anecdotal evidence is available, such data are not systematic or time-tested. Last, as a multifaceted phenomenon, the MS/TC is best described by the case study, which allows for inclusion of many variables (complex social and economic contexts, land use, architectural design, planning process, financing and legal structure, etc.).

This thesis is structured in a slightly unconventional format, which puts the case studies before the theoretical review. Chapter Two is an exposition of the three case studies: Downtown Park Forest, in Park Forest, IL; Mizner Park, in Boca Raton, FL; and Redmond Town Center, in Redmond, WA. Chapter Three presents a reflection on social, functional, economic and financial issues which inform MS/TC developments. The reflections interweave a theoretical foundation with practical observations based on evidence uncovered in the case studies. Chapter Four concludes with answers to the thesis questions, in order to identify the circumstances and prospects for creating public space-anchored, suburban mixed-use development.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1} Two earlier examples are Miami Lakes Town Center in Miami Lakes, FL, and Shirlington Village in Arlington, VA.
\item \textsuperscript{3} Charles Lockwood, "Putting the Urb in the Suburbs," Planning, Vol. 63, No. 6, June 1997, pp. 18-21.
\item \textsuperscript{4} Alex Achimore, "Putting the Community Back into Community Retail," Urban Land, Vol. 52, No. 8, August 1993, pp. 33-38
\item \textsuperscript{5} Clifford Pearson, "Reworking the Mall," Vol. 181, No. 3, Architectural Record, March 1993, pp. 84-93.
\item \textsuperscript{6} "Main Street Goes Suburban," p. 123.
\end{itemize}
Chapter 2: CASE STUDIES

This chapter delves directly into case studies of projects which are part of the new Main Street/Town Center development trend. The case method is used because of the recentness and complexity of new Main Street/Town Center developments. Profiles seek to capture variables including social and economic contexts, land use, architectural design, planning process, financing and legal structure.

Questions posed to project developers and managers included:

- How did the idea develop? What were the iterations, and for what reasons?
- What market conditions have the projects reacted to?
- How are the streets, blocks and open spaces configured? How is the project linked to its surroundings?
- What system is used to accommodate circulation of autos and pedestrians?
- How did the projects attract tenants and financing?
- How is the project performing in terms of rents and absorption?
- Who carries the burden of programming/maintenance of public space?
- What is development’s outlook for follow-on phases and maturity?

The evidence illuminates the manner in which the MS/TC projects’ design features interact with commercial real estate considerations. Together the three cases help to formulate an understanding of conditions under which a public space-anchored project is an appropriate or feasible development strategy.

Three case studies are Downtown Park Forest, in Park Forest, IL; Mizner Park in Boca Raton, FL; and Redmond Town Center in Redmond, WA. All are public space oriented, mixed-use projects. They were chosen because they represent a variety of contexts:

- Market conditions vary — the communities range in size and in pace of growth.
- Deal structures straddle three types: public, public/private, and private profit-seeking.
- Project sites range from adaptive reuse, to razing and rebuilding, to greenfield development.
- Geographically, they span the United States.

In addition to their common design approach of using a street pattern punctuated by a central public space, the cases have a common timeframe. They are all projects of the 1990s, with development phases ongoing in 1998.

As a roadmap to the reader, there is a brief synopsis of each project at the beginning of the case study. Each case is subdivided into sections: Regional Context, Site and Project History, Market, Physical Configuration, and Management.
DOWNTOWN PARK FOREST
Village of Park Forest, Illinois

Developer: The Village of Park Forest
Project Architect: The Lakota Group

Downtown will center around New Main Street, cut through a former pedestrian-only greensward. The street will afford visibility and access to retail businesses. (Fig. 1)

Downtown Park Forest, Illinois is a redevelopment to create a new Main Street within a seasoned community. Headed by a public development entity, the Village of Park Forest, the project is in its ongoing first phase as of summer, 1998. The result is targeted as a community-scaled development, with a cultural market niche targeted to a regional audience. A major objective is to downsize net retail space from the preexisting shopping center. Including all components, however, total square footage will end up being greater than the previous. The program mix will be significantly shifted from primarily retail, to a mixture of retail, civic, office, cultural, and residential uses. The developer is using a strategy of cutting new streets into the formerly non-street-aligned site, and converting surface parking area into mixed-use built space. Property ownership will devolve to numerous property owners. The design seeks to connect development on the site more closely with the surrounding community, and to create a financially and socially sustainable balance of automobile and pedestrian access.
Regional Context
The Village of Park Forest, Illinois was developed in the 1940's in what was then a rather dis-
tant suburban area of Chicago, approximately 30 miles south of the city's main business dis-
trict, the Loop. The village is still relatively peripheral to the metropolis, but given a half-cen-
tury of subsequent growth, the town is by no means isolated. Commuter rail and surface tran-
sit systems connect many residents to daily employment in central Chicago. Interstates 57 and
94 and major state highways traverse the prairie on all sides of the town. Park Forest has re-
tained a distinct identity as the region has matured around it.

Park Forest was designed in a utopian town-planning idiom known as the greenbelt move-
ment. The movement's other, well-known projects included Greenbelt, Maryland and Greendale,
Wisconsin, which were developed in the 1930s as part of a Depression-era, WPA enterprise. As
the nation's first post-war planned community, Park Forest used the same heavily-landscaped
design approach to create a community catering to the families of returning GI's. Entrepreneur
developers Philip Klutznick and Nathan Manilow adopted the greenbelt layout of curving
streets, which contrasted then and now with the grid layout of other greater Chicago commu-
nities. The result was a cohesive enclave of single-family homes and garden apartments inter-
mingled with a complement of parks and civic buildings, such as a library, post office, and
community recreation center. (Fig. 2) The village design was amenable not only to automobiles
but also to pedestrians because of its trails and small radius.

Park Forest roughly copied prior greenbelt examples in its residential aspects but boasted a
commercial innovation: Park Forest Shopping Center, opened in 1952. With ample car parking
this auto-oriented, department-store anchored retail core was recognized as the first planned
regional shopping mall in the Midwest.1 This same core at the village's geographic center now
presents an opportunity for another innovation, to recapture its land value using a public space-
anchored, street-making development approach.

Site and Project History
As a commercial pioneer, Park Forest Shopping Center charted new territory in real estate
design and development. It generated enough success to sustain it financially for several de-
cades, but in retrospect, the center was characterized by significant shortcomings. "As a re-
gional mall, it was probably doomed from the start," reflected Village Manager Janet Muchnik
in 1998.2 In its place the village is attempting to recreate the district as a community downtown.

The open-air Park Forest Shopping Center was in contrast with the typical form of today's
enclosed regional mall. (Fig. 3) Otherwise, Park Forest used a similar approach to its tenant mix: department stores were situated at either end of a roughly axial layout, with smaller specialty stores in between. Like today’s regional mall prototype, it was surrounded by surface parking lots, provided at a ratio of 6 spaces per 1,000 square feet — on the generous side of the more common 5 per 1,000 benchmark. The axial elements of the mall were not precisely parallel, but rather, the buildings were staggered in a loosely-widening V-shape which opened out onto a common area at the foot of the Marshall Field’s department store. The in-line stores were mostly one-story construction, though buildings at one end of the axis, abutting surface parking, were two stories with office above. A covered arcade ran along each inside flank of the landscaped greensward axis. In the irregular footprint some in-line stores fronted onto parking lots, but most of them faced only the pedestrian inner greensward and therefore were not visible to passing commercial traffic. Importantly, the center was situated at the very center of the greenbelt suburb, not adjacent to any major street artery.

Park Forest Shopping Center positioned itself in the marketplace primarily as a regional mall. And, for many years, its patronage did encompass the southern Chicago/western Indiana region, pulled in by Marshall Field’s and another, now defunct, department store chain. There was also a grocery store, which catered to the community market. Later, a Sears department store was added to the mix, further boosting the regional retail component. As the first of its type Park Forest Shopping Center quickly established a strong foothold in the suburban market. This customer base remained loyal through the 1970s, when the center entered into a long decline.

At that time newer properties began to eclipse Park Forest for several reasons. First, the center was not visible from any highway. It missed out on attracting critical drive-past traffic. Drivers turned instead into the highly visible, well-signed new centers. Second, Park Forest’s anchors were smaller and offered lesser product selection, in a more dated interior layout. Third, the center had little to offer in terms of shopping experience. Park Forest was neither vibrant and glitzy like Chicago’s Michigan Avenue, nor safe, comfortable and climate-controlled like the enclosed competitors.³ Two new malls in an overlapping catchment area, opened in the 1970’s and 1980’s, respectively, sealed the fate of Park Forest Shopping Center: nearby Lincoln Mall, with four anchors including a Sears branch lured away from Park Forest for $13 million; and upscale Orland Park, with a much larger Marshall Field’s as well as Lord & Taylor and Saks.

Buffeted by the double strike of disadvantageous site planning and market factors, in the late 1970’s Park Forest Shopping Center began to spiral downward in patronage and profitability. The cycle was self-reinforcing. As the number of shoppers declined, some of the in-line stores
fell vacant. There was no way to drive past most of them in order to see what was available. But people were reluctant to park, and walk into the greensward/arcade to explore: the amount of foot-traffic into the axis dropped off, generating fear for personal safety of traveling into its desolate space.  

Ill-advised property management and leasing maneuvers exacerbated this decline. Remarkably, the late addition of the Sears, instead of being a boon, was tremendously injurious blow, or as Village Manager Muchnik, called it, “the kiss of death.” This effect was due to Sears’ sitting in the center’s eastern parking lot, which blocked the view of the rest of the development from Western Avenue, the center’s primary entrance. Also, as part of a releasing effort the center’s owners relocated the grocery store out of the center, stripping away a major source of regular spending traffic. These two changes reduced the aggregate number of customers, contributing to both the perception and the reality of an underpatronized center.

Despite these problems the open public space persisted as a community hub. The main locus of interaction was a plaza at the western end of the greensward, near the eastern foot of Marshall Field’s. The plaza hosted numerous community events, including annually scheduled draws — a renowned, juried September arts festival and a well-attended 10K footrace. The site was failing as an investment, but still held value for the village. The public space at the heart of the center was the most viable element of the development. The question was, could the value of that piece be leveraged?

The hybrid Park Forest Shopping Center underwent a few more attempts at resuscitation. Around 1986, a new owner performed a facelift on the center, and added a food court near the public plaza. (Fig. 4) Other proposals were floated to redevelop the center, including the idea to convert it into an antiques mall. There was a measure of public support, since the center was a critical piece of the local economy. In 1986 the village, in conjunction with Cook County, created a Tax Increment Financing district to pay for the renovation. But these modest changes could not counteract the greater economic forces which dragged the center into financial distress.

By 1993, with a 50% vacancy rate the center was about to turn out the lights. The defunct anchor’s shell plus many in-line stores along the south flank were empty, although Marshall Field’s and Sears were still operating. The center at that point had been purchased by another firm, the Parkside Co., whose redevelopment idea presages the current one. Parkside intended to convert the shopping center into a traditional downtown, emphasizing service businesses and offices rather than retail shops, but failed to make progress. In 1995, after a period of
financial mismanagement, the center was left with an outstanding bill for several million dollars in back taxes. The village stepped in, investing $4 million earmarked to pay off the taxes, purchase space for a new village hall in the center, and bankroll one year’s worth of operating expenses — a stopgap effort.

The Village of Park Forest eventually became the site’s owner after a contentious episode which culminated in the testing of an Illinois statute at court. The argument ran that by paying off the back taxes, the village gained a minority equity stake in the ownership. The village asked the court to seize title from the current owner and place the center into receivership. After a brief period of negotiations lasting but a single week, Parkside Co. sold its stake to the village for $100,000. The Village of Park Forest thus gained a clear title, fee simple ownership of the entire property.7

The village catapulted into the role of planner and developer in autumn, 1995. During that very same period, Sears announced that it would terminate its lease, having signed its deal at the competitor mall. The apparent disaster turned out to be a blessing in disguise, because their departure created the opportunity to address both financial and land-planning issues. In terms of dollars and cents, the store agreed to pay a sum totaling $2.6 million to compensate for estimated lost sales and property tax revenues, which would have been accrued during the remainder of the lease. This windfall enabled the village to dissolve the existing TIF debt structure (which still had 16 years left to retirement) and to refinance with a new TIF, at more favorable repayment terms. The redevelopment prospect was daunting, but the village as developer was liberated by having so much leeway. Naturally it had a large measure of control over what could be done with the land, including making any needed changes to zoning and street infrastructure. When in the following year Marshall Field’s gave its goodbye notice, “the village began taking control of its destiny,” as Muchnik said.8

The first phase in the redevelopment of central Park Forest was to begin with demolition of certain vacant properties and carving new streets. (Figs. 5 and 6) This bold and highly visible set of steps would not only prepare the site for new building and fit-out, but would convince prospective tenants and investors that the project was real, and not a pipedream. As of spring 1998, already some 230,000 square feet of retail space has been razed to enable construction of New Main Street.9

Market
The idea to redevelop the center as a public space-anchored district fits into Park Forest’s demographic context. The property is at the geographic center of a relatively dense customer base
of village residents, with more than one half of the 25,000 residents living within half a mile. Also, Park Forest has a demonstrably strong community identity. This has been witnessed by formal recognition, twice in the annual designation as All-America City and also as a National Planning Landmark.

According to the plans for Downtown Park Forest, the new tenant mix will consist of far less retail space and position itself as a community downtown — not a regional draw. There will be no department stores. Shops and services will include such businesses as a coffee house, bakery, Italian restaurant, insurance broker, and early education learning center. (Fig. 7) These local services will be joined by destination businesses, such as a bridal salon and an arthouse cinema. In fact, the cinema’s owner is the first landlord to purchase land and buildings in Downtown Park Forest. These commercial enterprises are surrounded within a 10-minute walk by a large number of civic facilities, such as a swimming/recreation center, library, post office, and police, fire and health departments. Park Forest Village itself chose to locate there, by moving the village hall into a second story office space.

For a suburb the village has an unusually large performing and visual arts community, including a full equity theater, a professional symphony orchestra, fine arts gallery and a community-operated cultural center. The village is betting this makes a cultural market niche with the potential for a regional draw. Former retail space will now provide headquarters for the Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra, and headquarters plus performance space for the Illinois Theater Center. The open space will add to the cultural programming not only with the annual arts festival but possibly by converting the sunken window well of Marshall Field’s into an amphitheater for concerts and outdoor movies, which could be screened against the wall. (Fig. 8) In playing to the cultural component the village is trying to sustain use of the open space for those activities in which it has always functioned well.

For the contemporary development the element with the strongest apparent market is not commercial but residential. Senior, congregate housing and a townhouse development will be built on old surface parking areas. This process is well under way — as of summer 1998 the village has already engaged in an RFP process and selected residential developers. These components seem like a natural fit. Residents will be able to take advantage of the adjacent village downtown without having to use a car. This proximity is desirable especially for people living in the senior housing development. The ensuing extra pedestrian activity will help render the new downtown more populated, safe and attractive. Residents will expand the spending base, especially for stores (by the house-furnishing townhome-owners) and services and cultural facilities (both resident groups). The addition of the residential component should accelerate the
completion and absorption of the new downtown's total new built space, by taking advantage of continued demand for housing in the village. Both the townhouse and senior neighborhoods will connect directly to New Main Street.

For the record of market psychology, it should be noted that at least one of the designs submitted to the RFP was for a gated enclave. That shows that even in a plan seemingly filled with positive public spirit, not everyone in the market wears rose-colored glasses. Respondent developers indicated that for a residential market many people greatly value strict privacy. The village awarded development rights to a plan which more closely matches its public space-oriented tenor.

A major question which looms is, who will fill the 87,000 sq. ft. Marshall Field's? The edifice is important in framing the exterior space, south of the plaza. (Fig. 9) Because of the aforementioned problems it seems virtually impossible that the building would again be used for retail. Rather the structure will have to find a taker for an adaptive reuse, for example, as a toll-free inbound calling center, or the adult education satellite facility of a state university.

Physical Configuration
The demolition of Sears enabled the radical reconfiguring of the former shopping center's land. As the newest and nicest among the center's buildings, that building presumably could have been adapted for another commercial use, and its demolition sparked controversy. Before Sears departed its presence had effectively precluded the option to employ a street-making redevelopment strategy. The store lay right in the middle of where an new east-west new main street sensibly would go, extruding the axis of the old greensward and connecting the central buildings with the arterial Western Avenue. Now unneeded, the Sears building was one of the first structures to be razed.

Unhindered by major leases, the village intends for the redeveloped center to function as a traditional downtown, with all the trappings ranging from multiple property ownership to community symbolism, and based around the freshly-cut New Main Street. John LaMotte, senior principal of project designers The Lakota Group, described that a street-making approach was a natural solution to an economic problem. Park Forest had to drastically reduce the amount of retail space, because there was no realistic scenario in which it would ever again be competitive on a large scale. That revelation made it yet more abundantly clear that the land devoted to
surface parking lots, which ringed the old shopping center’s structures in 360°, had to be converted to productive use. (Fig. 10)

Downtown Park Forest’s street grid will consist of New Main Street running east-west, and Forest Boulevard plus some narrower, as-yet-unnamed streets running north-south. (Fig. 11) The streetscape will be furnished with traffic calming devices, such as widening sidewalks at intersections and pavers in the crosswalk, and street furniture such as benches and lights. (Fig. 12) The village hopes this system will make the corridor co-habitable by autos and pedestrians, to encourage use such as for walks to an ice-cream parlor. The streets separate the parcel into five big chunks, for further subdivision for development and sale.

This street setup will improve access into the heart of the site, making the properties much more visible. There remains the issue of Downtown Park Forest floating within the residential village, away from traffic arteries. The designers have tried to make New Main Street a major thoroughfare with signaled, not-quite-90° intersections at Western Avenue and Orchard Drive, but it dead-ends at both east and west, which will keep its visibility limited. (Fig. 13) The old Park Forest center was heralded at the periphery of the village, where the major regional roads pass, in an effort to make up for the lack of non-verbal navigational clues. Perhaps this will not be an issue any more if the development’s market is for community, or those with directions to a specific destination.

A substantial portion of the redeveloped surface parking area will become residential. A senior congregate housing facility will lie along New Main Street to the east. Several blocks of townhouses will line new side streets in the northwest quadrant. These residential land uses are desirable for several market-related reasons, described above, while physically, they help to create a buffer between the commercial property at the center of the new downtown, and the single family homes in the neighborhoods beyond the periphery. (Figs. 14-15)

Management
When the redevelopment is complete, the Village of Park Forest will have sold off most of the buildings, leases and land, and will own the public plaza and streets. It will retain the role of coordinating programming for the public space. This task is made much easier because the village already sponsors a well-established calendar of events.

To handle care for the streets, including the arcaded sidewalks, banners and street furniture, the development will turn to a collaborative management technique. Downtown Park Forest will employ management coordination, an undeniable advantage of its former nemesis, the
conventional mall. In this system the centralized role covers the establishment of certain opening hours, coordination of sale dates, and property maintenance such as snowplowing the parking lot and caring for plantings in the center. These activities are paid for by Common Area Maintenance (CAM) dollars, which are not typically even among stores, but represent a functioning balance with respect to the economic synergy among tenants in a multi-store development. This coordinating system addresses the problem of property management externalities, and helps make operations more reliable for customers and more predictable for investors.

Downtown Park Forest will not sacrifice these benefits. Instead, it will retain a mall-like approach to CAM and planning. This will circumvent some of the problems which plague small-town downtown and main street areas. In a standard downtown, there are many property owners, and many tenants own their own stores. Muchnik reflected that old Main Streets have been dying because of a lack of coordination, especially with regard to the hours of operation. To combat this, the redeveloped Park Forest is governed by a “Plat of Covenants,” which was devised to assign obligations at the deed level. Property owners will have to abide by the coordinating system, including participating in the owners’ association, contributing to CAM costs for parking, the village green, lighting, and other services. In addition, tenants will be required to participate in the tenants’ association, subscribing to joint marketing promotions and coordinating their opening hours. There was no fancy formula used to create the plat; essentially the village drew lines around the buildings.

**Summary**

Downtown Park Forest is an interesting case study because it addresses a plight which is increasingly common in the United States: tremendous excess of retail on a substantially-sized site. Though its outcome cannot be known, it seems to represent a model for handling both site planning and marketing concerns. The village took a realistic look at what the market would bear and then sought to fragment a monolithic, insurmountable problem into many, more manageable ones. As a result of this scrutiny both the expected tenants and the street-circumscribed blocks are downscaled to fit a village. The residential component so far has been a relatively easy sell unclouded by having to make development concessions. Its program for ongoing coordination of common area maintenance and management, coupled with property sales to a variety of owners, suggests a potential for long-term stability.

The example of Downtown Park Forest may not be easily replicable from the standpoint of development process. For one thing, unlike many suburbs the site is almost ideally suited to this kind of retrofitting, because of its location in the rather quaint greenbelt-style town. The village has been able to orchestrate the main street redevelopment due to a highly unusual
circumstance of gaining virtually complete ownership, overnight, for an extremely low price. The public developer did not have to face the kind of political battle, over zoning or growth or personalities, which is likely to ensue in the case of other failed malls.

2. "In the Works...Downtown Park Forest," Planning, Vol. 64, No. 4, April 1998, p. 46.
3. Interview, Janet Muchnik, Village Manager, Village of Park Forest, Park Forest, IL, 6/30/98.
4. Interview, John LaMotte, Senior Principal, The Lakota Group, Chicago, IL, 6/30/98.
5. Muchnik interview.
7. Muchnik interview.
8. Muchnik interview.
10. Downtown Park Forest’s trade area within a one-mile radius consists of 24,656 people in 9,119 households, with average age 32.5, and average household income of $36,000. Up to a radius of five miles, the average household size remains roughly constant (2.7/2.8 persons per household), however, the average income in this larger area rises to $54,908. Population density drops drastically from 7,848 per square mile at a one mile radius to 1,753 per square mile at five miles. From “Downtown Park Forest.”
11. LaMotte interview.
12. Muchnik interview.
13. Muchnik interview.
15. Muchnik interview.
The site is embedded in the village's curvilinear layout. (Fig. 2)

The 1952 mall was surrounded by parking by isolated from major thoroughfares. The X'd buildings have since been demolished. (Fig. 3)

Weathered reminders of previous redevelopment efforts cast a melancholy air which will have to be eradicated for the project to be a success. (Fig. 4)

Panorama of the expansive former Sears store site. (Fig. 5)
Downtown Park Forest's plan divides up the land and buildings into salable units. (Fig. 6)

Allstate Insurance and Gateway Learning Center are local service tenants. (Fig. 7)

The village envisions converting this well of the Marshall Field's building into an amphitheater. (Fig. 8)

The central plaza and surrounding uses. (Fig. 9)
Chapter 2: CASE STUDIES

Downtown Park Forest

Strolling home through an old surface parking lot. (Fig. 10)

Traffic calming features and street furniture restore a habitable streetscape – but inhabitants must follow. (Fig. 11)

Rather than the curved option, New Main Street will be cut as a straight street which is slightly off perpendicular to Western Ave. This preferred layout was made possible by selling land in the needed configurations to satisfy both buyers and traffic engineers. (Fig. 12)

Cars and pedestrians may publicly circulate from New Main Street into the residential cluster on northwestern parcel "D". (Fig. 13)

Original greenbelt apartments (left) abut the area where more multifamily buildings are being built. (Fig. 14)

The invitation for channeled vehicular circulation is a major strategy in recreating valuable use for the central site. (Fig. 15)
MIZNER PARK
Boca Raton, Florida

Developer: Crocker & Company
Project Architect: Cooper Carry & Associates

Mizner Park in Boca Raton, Florida is a completely new development on a formerly developed site, which creates a new commercial and residential area within a seasoned small-city community. Headed by a private development entity in concert with the local public redevelopment authority, the project is in its third phase as of summer, 1998. The result is targeted primarily as a regional-scaled development, but also includes a substantial residential component. A major objective is to capture private rent-generated profit and public tax revenue, multiplied by a catalytic effect on the adjacent downtown. The mixed-use program completely replaces the retail-only use which existed previously. The developer is using a strategy of redeploying the acreage from enclosed retail-plus-surface parking, into mixed-use space with a street fabric. Mizner Park's built spaces are arrayed around a publicly-owned, lushly-landscaped axial park stretching to three street blocks in length. Mizner Park creates a new centerpiece for its surrounding neighborhoods.
Regional Context
Mizner Park is constructed on the site of a failed regional retail complex, the Boca Raton Mall. In both physical form and leasing structure, that development was a prototypical barbell-layout regional mall, surrounded by a sea of surface parking built to the usual generous ratio. The 29-acre parcel is adjacent to Boca Raton’s old downtown and is less than a mile west of the Atlantic Ocean beachfront. After opening in 1973, the mall achieved modest financial success in the upscale community of Boca Raton for only about a decade. One view holds that the mall was never really a major hit, that it was a formula mall too shabby for the well-heeled clientele who instead preferred shopping at Fashion Square in nearby Pompano Beach. The same competitive dynamic governing so much suburban retail held sway at Boca. In short, when a newer and better mall opened, the Boca Raton Mall quickly became underpatronized and obsolete. The downfall in this case came with the opening of Town Center Mall in 1980.

Boca Raton is in some respects not a suburb. Rather, it is part of a chain of small cities including Fort Lauderdale, Palm Beach and a host of petite communities, which extends northward from Miami along the coast. Boca Raton is integrated regionally with Miami, but at more than 40 miles north of that urban center, has a somewhat distinct identity. The wealthy community is a combination of south Florida beach town, with a hefty element of tourism and retirement, and some Class A office presence. Due to its small size as a city, its location within the sphere of greater Miami, and its auto-oriented, low-rise form, Boca Raton can be considered in urban design terms as comparable to a suburb for the purpose of this thesis.

History
Mizner Park has a complicated history which has been marked by both controversy and praise. The praise has been steady. The development has been lauded by a variety of awards programs, as Winner, 1991, NAIOP Awards of Excellence, Mixed-Use Urban Development; Co-winner, 1992, Monitor Centers and Stores of Excellence; and development model in the Urban Land Institute’s Project Reference File, 1992. The project entered into competition for the Arthur D. Little Overall Excellence in Economic Development Award in 1994. The history illuminates how Mizner Park came to be developed and financed by a public-private partnership. These partners were an experienced Florida development company, Crocker & Company (Crocker Realty Trust), and the Boca Raton Community Redevelopment Agency.

In 1980 the new Town Center Mall, a competitor of Boca Raton Mall, opened to the west of the city, spawning a building boom which siphoned business away from downtown. This new subcenter was closer to I-95, the interstate which had opened in 1970, miles inland from the...
older coastal road and bypassing the city center. Immediately alarmed, the city ordered a blight study, which was performed quickly. Blight was determined to exist, and to address this problem, the Boca Raton Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) was formed in 1982.

The CRA struggled for several years to put together a viable project. An early proposal for a hotel and office complex was rejected due to its perceived enormity. By 1987, a plan for redevelopment of the downtown was unveiled. Named “Art Park,” it would have been home to local cultural groups and spacious parks. The project would have required passage of a $93 million bond issue. The plan was formally submitted, but residents balked at the plan’s cost, and it fizzled out without a referendum.

In March 1988, developer Tom Crocker unveiled a plan to buy and tear down the failing Boca Raton Mall, and sealed the purchase. Thereafter a public-private partnership was explored, in which Crocker would enter into a deal with the CRA, and develop Mizner Park as a mixed-use cultural, retail and office complex. The group “Let the People Speak” formed in opposition to the plan. But in January 1989, Mizner Park was approved by voters, by the margin 62 percent to 38 percent. The following month, Crocker signed a deal with the CRA, in which the CRA agreed to buy back the future Mizner Park site from Crocker and to allow his company to lease land for retail and office complexes there.

The financing arrangement was a combination of public debt and tax relief, and equity investment by a deep-pocketed partner. The Community Redevelopment Agency issued tax-free re-development bonds using funds borrowed from the City of Gulf breeze, Florida, at tax-free rates (a type of pool financing) and then used the funds to purchase the Boca Raton Mall, already owned at that point by Crocker & Company. The CRA leased back 12 acres of the razed site to Crocker to build the commercial component. The bonds are repayable via tax increment financing, in a process that redirects existing tax dollars and other non-tax revenues; Mizner Park pays for itself without an increase to property or utility taxes. Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association provided construction and permanent financing to Crocker on an all-equity basis. Teachers invested $60 million, $15 million and $30.5 million in each of the three phases, respectively, for a total of $105 million.2

Given the public-private nature of the deal and the need to respond to a contingent of critics, Mizner Park underwent a public planning and design process. Subsequently, and after nearly a decade of effort and concern since the opening of Town Center Mall, the pace of development was rapid. In 1990, Mizner Park underwent fast-track construction and work on phase one was
completed in just eight months. Meanwhile the CRA won a court battle with downtown property owner Jim Batmasian, who had argued that the blight study which had led to creation of the CRA had been conducted improperly. A ruling in favor of this suit would have stemmed the deal. Also during 1990, many arts groups which had still been on board bowed out; some said they couldn’t afford to move into the park, while others did not like the space being offered.

Profit-seeking components moved ahead. December 1990, the AMC Theater cinema eightplex was the first business to open at Mizner Park. Locally-based Caldwell Theater announced, but then withdrew, a plan to build an adjunct stage for its live performances at Mizner Park. On January 11, 1991, Mizner Park’s stores and restaurants opened, and apartment residents moved in. From 1991 onward, expansion of the development continued. Subsequent phases brought the construction of townhomes to the east of the park, Jacobson’s department store and the cartoon museum to the south, and, in 1998, an office building in the southeast corner of the site.

Market
Mizner Park is a product of public design process, and the market dictated “a town square that responds to the automobile,” in the words of Charlie Siemon, the CRA’s team leader for Mizner Park. In the original public-private proposal, Crocker’s scheme was for a more traditional strip-type retail center, which would have fronted onto Federal Highway, the adjacent arterial. After public sector input, the project was instead oriented inward. The resulting design contains mixed-use buildings facing a park/main street, called the Plaza Real, introduced to enhance a village-like ambiance. (Fig. 17) Public demand for new downtown housing led also to the introduction of 136 luxury residential apartments, the first new residential construction in central Boca Raton in ten years. (Fig. 18) The public captured an opportunity not only to eradicate the former “blight,” but also to establish a new town center anchored by public space.

In response to this market demand, Mizner Park opened with the four primary mixed-use buildings and Plaza Real in place. This seemed to satisfy both kinds of customer — casual patrons, and tenants with leases. The approach maximized the value of the synergy between the components for swift leasing, especially of the 136 apartments, which were 100% rented prior to construction completion. The luxurious park was a paramount factor in attracting residents, who were immediately able to enjoy the benefits of the space. The entertainment-oriented tenants, including the restaurants with their outdoor seating areas, captured spending traffic from people who flocked to the much-anticipated park. These amenities in turn attracted tenants to the small office suites above the retail on the western flank. Office tenants tended to
be rather high-class organizations, for example, the financial firm Bear Stearns. In the wealthy town, the development quickly became a high-class domain.

The second, multi-component phase addressed both strong and weak forces in the market. Of the residential component, Crocker & Company had not initially anticipated such strong demand. After the earlier leasing bonanza the developer created an additional 136 apartments and townhomes, plus a resident fitness club and swimming pool, in order to capitalize further on the blossoming residential neighborhood. The retail market gained an anchor in Jacobson’s department store, an upscale men’s and women’s apparel store.

Augmentation of the cultural component was another part of phase two, since with the exception of the performance gazebos and amphitheater, this piece of the public-private development was missing. This exclusion occurred despite promises made during the controversial financing decision-making, on the heels of the scrapped Art Park proposal. The failure to materialize occurred for a multitude of reasons, including internal disagreement within local arts establishments. However, in 1994 a local group of patrons did muster up the vision and funds to commission and build an International Museum of Cartoon Art, developed in phase two. The facility is attractive, but seems like a rather odd addition to Mizner Park, in contrast to a place like New York. The Boca Raton market is rather small for a narrowly-targeted museum, especially one which has no obvious connection with the community (as perhaps an aviation museum would have in Seattle, Boeing’s hometown); the cartoon museum’s lackluster attendance in its first few years testifies as such.

Crocker’s leasing office literature describes that by 1997, the project’s 54-store retail component was more than 98% leased with only one vacant store space remaining in the project. The average sales per square foot were $445 (retail) and $575 (restaurant). The per-square-foot retail rents exceeded $36 net per square foot, nudging those at Town Center Mall. According to the leasing office, at that time national tenants were coming to Mizner and little solicitation was necessary.

Even with high occupancy, retail leasing required attention, to sustain a delicate strategic balance. There were conflicting forces at work. The first force was to the decided benefit of the developer. As the project began to mature and rent levels increased, it became increasingly viable to attract national retailers capable of paying rents commensurate with those at the nearby fashion malls. The countervailing second force was market positioning. To retain its unique retailing niche as a kind of “mall that’s not a mall,” Mizner Park needed to avoid replicating the same menu of national retailers which could be found in its competitors’ tenant mix. Therefore
the selection should not, and does not lean toward the increasingly commonplace lineup of Gap, Pottery Barn, etc. Instead, its optimal mix is a combination of relatively unique national retailers such as women’s clothier Nicole Miller, and ritzy Mom’n’Pop’s such as art galleries and eveningwear boutiques.7

The modestly-sized local office market has been addressed first with the suites over retail, and in the third phase with a freestanding property under construction in 1998. At seven stories and totaling 173,000 square feet, the new building is positioned as Class A-Plus (the “plus” is due to its exceptionally rich detailing).8 (Fig. 19) Locally the market for office has been swamped because of the closure of IBM’s Boca Raton facilities, which dumped millions of square feet. Nevertheless, the speculative development has been gaining leasing momentum in 1998, apparently boosted greatly by its location adjacent to the upscale amenities. There is a tricky part to the sell, though, in that the office has no dedicated garage. This is a perceived problem among some tenants and may prove to have been a mistaken decision by the developer. But, the leasing office believes — and tries to compel prospective tenants into agreeing — that there is enough parking space available, with 2,500 nearby slots for multiple use by patrons of the cinema and retail in addition to the office. The leasing manager points out that office employees in many cities, such as Boston, New York and Washington, are used to parking at a lot which may be down the street a block or two, and not necessarily under their own building. Since a sizeable portion of the Boca Raton office market consists of firms which are locating a branch office from those northeastern markets, this may be a target market for absorbing the space.9

To date the market has borne up the investment by both bondholders and equity investors. Mizner Park has created return to the city via a significant increase in the tax base. The original, failed mall, valued at $10 million, generated $210,000 in real estate taxes, while total taxes upon the project’s completion will be $2.2 million - an increase of almost two million dollars. The employment base doubled from 500 to 1,000 compared to the old mall.10 And judging by available data as the project begins to mature, Teachers’ $105M participation appears to have been entered into with good reason. The project leased quickly in the sluggish market of the early 1990s. The retail/commercial component was more than 90 percent leased before Grand Opening, and all rental apartments were leased pre-construction. Three years later, retail and apartment space was fully leased and office was over 90 percent leased. Another success indicator was positive rent roll-over. Mizner Park’s retail rents p.s.f. had jumped from $21 net, initially, to $25-$35 three years later, while office rents represented the market’s highest rates of $12.50-$15 in 1994.
Mizner Park has received high praise for its catalytic effects. In 1997, state officials named Boca Raton as one of Florida’s five [most] sustainable communities, citing Mizner Park’s role in the revitalization of the downtown area. Since the project began, other large-scale commercial developments have commenced nearby, including a Publix grocery and a Trammell Crow residential development in which units are selling for $300K+. The city scored 11.5 of a possible 12 points in a ranking for the state’s sustainable communities project. The designation will give Boca Raton more leeway in development by cutting some of the bureaucratic approvals and planning as well as higher priority for state funding. Officials cited easy access to public transportation and Boca Raton’s redeveloped downtown, with Mizner Park as the centerpiece, as reasons for choosing the city for Florida sustainable communities project.11

**Physical Configuration**

Mizner Park’s properties are primarily arrayed around the extravagantly furnished linear park, the Plaza Real.12 (Fig. 20) The entire parcel is circumscribed by the four streets which had run around the old mall, and in area is devoted two-thirds to open space. Within the 29 acres, a new street network has been constructed. The major street interior to the project is a one-way conduit which loops first south, and then north around the Plaza Real. Two minor east-west streets align with the street grid of the residential neighborhood to the east, across Mizner Boulevard. (Two additional interleaving streets from the adjacent neighborhood do not extend into the site, but rather dead-end opposite the apartment tower.) That boulevard itself is a renamed and re-landscaped version of the street which existed there during the days of the Boca Raton Mall. The name “Mizner Boulevard” is intended to foster a sense of grandeur and identity for the project, which sets it apart from the surrounding system of numbered streets typical of south Florida. The other adjacent arterial, Federal Highway to the west, has maintained its same name since the redevelopment, but now has a palm-landscaped median. (Fig. 21)

The periphery of Mizner Park is designed to be harmonious with its surroundings, though the sides are treated differently in response to adjacent land uses. The eastern perimeter consists of townhouses and apartments which face the residential community across Mizner Boulevard. The southern portion has a blunter scale commercial fabric: the new mid-rise office building and the department store abut community strip retail buildings. At the southern terminus of the Plaza Real, Palmetto Park Road — the perpendicular roadway — is undergoing transformation by the CRA from a strictly vehicular thoroughfare into a pedestrian promenade with wider decorative paved sidewalks, tree-lined vistas, and decorative benches, trash receptacles and light fixtures.13 The northern tip, which is a trapezoid of land at the confluence of Mizner Boulevard and Federal Highway, consists of wooded open space and the city-operated amphi-
theater. Some of this plainly-appointed park space will be replaced by a new museum and theater, which are scheduled to be built at the northern end, complementing a smaller amphitheater in a cultural apex, and spatially completing the transitional zone into the sheltered Plaza Real.

The western perimeter of Mizner Park, next to Federal Highway, is devoted to support systems for arriving at the place, inside. There are two direct turnings into the development from the northbound lane, onto two-way streets with on-street parking. The highway is presented mainly with parking decks partially camouflaged by heavy landscaping, but with no building fronts. Matching the project’s main facades, pink stucco clads the garages. This treatment gives a glimpse of the visual treat within the site but does not mitigate the appearance of that side as the “back” of the development. However, the semi-insularity is not a harmful gesture, because there is little urban fabric to attach. Opposite the highway is a small strip center; beyond that heading westward is an effective barrier composed of irregular patches of waste ground, another highway, a rail line, an access road and an industrial building. Mizner Park insulates itself against the highway corridor in a practical solution.

Inside the site, Mizner Park’s streets are designed with pavers and plaza details to provide vehicular access, curbside parking, and pedestrian access. (Fig. 22) The needed circulation elements are combined with open space amenities, furthering the its neo-Main Street atmosphere. There is surprisingly much on-street parking in front of the stores and restaurants, because cars can be parked on both sides of both one-way streets (i.e. curbside to both the buildings and the park). Free parking is offered both by valet and in self-park decks. (Figs. 23-24) The townhouses have owner-reserved spaces in parking decks which nestle between the homes and mixed-use buildings.

With regard to massing and layout, Mizner Park’s buildings display a strong public-space orientation which borrows from classical techniques. Perhaps most important is their layout with respect to the Plaza Real, the garden axis. The buildings which front this park have identical setbacks, creating a strong edge to the space. Along four of the blocks — the first development phase, with individual shops at ground level — runs an arcade. This shaded walkway is supported by a neoclassical colonnade with richly decorated capitals surmounted in some places by detailing such as carved lion faces. This colonnade is echoed by a parade of palm trees lining both the building and park sides of the street. Including the two museum and department store buildings at the south end of the park, all the structures have a frontal orientation to the park. The symmetry is carried through by the positioning of entrance porticos, which are aligned to mirror each other across the park. The east flanking buildings, including the residential proper-
ties adjacent to the park as well as the office and apartment towers a block removed from it, are somewhat taller than the structures to the west. But this does not throw the space off keel. The quadruple row of palms running down the length of the park establishes a volumetric ceiling to the public space which enhances its formal harmony and balance.

The visually harmonious buildings refer stylistically to the fanciful, highly articulated idiom of Addison Mizner, a renowned local architect, planner and developer from the 1920’s for whom the project is named. This style is a lush, elegant hybrid of Art Deco and neoclassical, tailored to south Florida’s tropical climate. The palette of exterior materials includes stucco in pastel hues and tile in deeper Mediterranean tones. The most predominant shade is a coral pink, which is not shockingly bright but rather appealing, in the vernacular. The lines and colors are further softened by tropical vegetation, in the form of trees and plantings at the base of the buildings as well as more plantings and vines which sprout and cascade from balconies and niches in the upper stories. The decidedly opulent detailing varies from structure to structure but is obviously applied by the same hand. The combined effect of the exterior design is to knit together the properties, framing the public space and underscoring the unique aesthetic essence of the locale.

Mizner Park has arranged its active entertainment and cultural uses into nodes. The entertainment uses are placed down the middle of the space, both in the park and on the abutting sidewalks. The profit-seeking uses are concentrated at the apex of the site. Seven restaurants, representing three levels of pricing in order to appeal to a broad range of markets, were gathered on the east and west sides of the fountain plaza, near the main valet parking station. (Fig. 25) This cluster helped aggregate a critical mass, good for people-watching and a sense of activity day and night. Against the backdrop of the mosaiced, multi-tiered fountain, Mizner Park sought to make the most of the public space’s “European” style. (Fig. 26) The cinema entrance is also in this cluster. The non-profit arts uses\(^4\) are located in nodes at the north and south ends of the garden axis. Small-scale concerts take place in gazebos dotted inside the Plaza Real. (Fig. 27)

Excepting the office building and townhouses, the various components are mixed vertically in buildings around the Plaza Real. This helps layer the public space with semi-public zones: apartment balconies overlooking the outdoor dining plazas and promenades below contribute to the social interaction. The small office suites over the retail are accessed by rear balconies, to increase privacy.

**Management**

The city owns the streets and park itself, and ground-leases the remaining land to Crocker.
Crocker owns the buildings above, except the museum, which pays $1.00 annually for its ground lease and the resident-owned townhomes. Concerts are the main programming element for the public space to incur costs, but simply keeping the park in its elegant state -- suitable for uses like taking wedding photos by the main fountain -- is expensive. The city is responsible for contracting out the maintenance, and has had a few newsworthy scraps over cost with Crocker, who is also the contractor.

In addition to the ongoing leasing decisions Crocker makes, the main management issue Mizner Park has faced is responding to parking needs. In 1997, three additional levels of parking were added to the northwest and southwest garages, to compensate for a shortfall.

**Summary**

Mizner Park’s success as a commercial investment and as a local development catalyst is exemplified in its vertical orientation. Multiple components are arrayed not just in adjacent parcels but in stacked multiple-use buildings. This verticality helps optimize the value of the land, fosters desirable 24-hour use patterns, accommodates a complex pattern of auto and pedestrian circulation, and frames the central public space with grandeur. The verticality expresses the project’s intelligent interweaving of market and design considerations. Street-level uses are all open and active; physically closed or uninviting uses such as the cinema and parking are configured on upper stories and behind the ground floor arcades. The verticality and density are notable because in a suburban environment, developments catering to a wealthy market are usually horizontally separated and less dense. The height afforded especially by the structures on the eastern flank of the Plaza Real as well as the plaza’s majestic rows of palm trees frame a public space of exceptional quality. The project has faced criticism for its perceived failure to deliver a large cultural component, while capturing much revenue in a deal which poses limited risk to the private development partner. By connecting with the surrounding fabric and inviting public use Mizner Park has helped spark further commercial development and is a magnet for further public space improvements.

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4 Kris Kodrich, “Introducing Boca Raton’s New Downtown,” Architecture Section of *The News*, 1/9/91, p. 2M.
5 “Arthur D. Little Overall Excellence in Economic Development Award” submission.
6 Interview, Jo Ann Root, Commercial Leasing Manager, Crocker Realty Trust (Mizner Park), Boca Raton, FL, 7/2/98.
7 Root Interview.
8 This component is a slight change from the two, 100,000 s.f. bldgs, which were initially projected to start construction in 1994.
9 Root Interview.
10 Crocker & Co., Arthur D. Little award submission.
12 The place strives for a regal tenor: its name means “Royal Plaza” in Spanish, and is in part an homage to namesake Addison Mizner, who was a champion of Spanish design.
13 Boca Raton web site/ci.boca-raton.fl.us.
14 The museums and city concert ground are planned to be joined in the future by a profit-seeking live theater company.
This axonometric plan, from a retail marketing brochure, shows not only shops and entertainment but also office and residential components, illustrating Mizner Park’s recognition of the synergy which may be realized in mixed-use development (Fig. 17).
Apartments over retail and restaurants on the eastern flank of the park. Their balconies enliven the streetscape. (Fig. 18)

The office component is richly detailed and edged to join Mizner Park's streetscape. (Fig. 19)

The various components are closely positioned to maximize the advantage of fronting the Plaza Real. (Fig. 20)
This aerial view faces east to the Atlantic ocean. Federal Highway runs alongside the bottom of the photo. Palmetto Park Road, which is undergoing relandscaping to transform it into a boulevard and financed by the city, extends perpendicular to the Plaza Real, at right. (Fig. 21)
This intersection illustrates Mizner Park’s traffic calming techniques, integration of auto and pedestrian circulation systems, and gradations of public space. (Fig. 22)

Valet parking outside Jacobson’s department store attracts patrons who value service, but even for those who don’t own Jaguars the valet assistance is free. (Fig. 23)

Parking is efficiently stacked between townhouses and mixed-use buildings for multi-component use. (Fig. 24)
Mizner Park’s cluster of upper-end restaurants is situated in an ambient commercial plaza between the main valet parking kiosk and the entrance to Palm Tower apartments. (Fig. 25)

The Plaza Real’s mosaiced central fountain. (Fig. 26)

Gazebos provide shade for park visitors and a site for small concerts. (Fig. 27)
REDMOND TOWN CENTER
Redmond, Washington

Developer: Winmar Company, Inc.
Project Architect: LMN Architects (Loschky, Marquardt and Nesholm)

Redmond Town Center positions two-level retail and entertainment uses in a street pattern next to Class A office space, as well as other components. (Fig. 28)

Redmond Town Center, in Redmond, Washington is a new development which creates a nexus within a fast growing, but established community. Headed by a private development entity, the project is in its ongoing second and third phases as of summer, 1998. The result is targeted as a combination of regional-scaled and community-scaled development. A major objective is to provide a mixture of high quality components which will weather well over the long term of continued regional growth, while continuing to foster and sustain both economic opportunity and recreational enjoyment. The program mixes regional and community retail, Class A office, entertainment, hotel, outdoor recreational and residential uses. The developer is using a strategy of deploying dense mixed-use built space in a site which abuts both a preexisting, older downtown and a natural ecosystem corridor. The design capitalizes on Redmond’s rarefied socioeconomic atmosphere with a denser, street-linked complement to old downtown.
Regional Context
Redmond Town Center is adjacent to the long-time downtown area of Redmond, a suburb approximately fifteen miles east of downtown Seattle. The area has grown explosively over the past two decades, a time during which the metropolitan region has catapulted, according to many measures, into a position as one of the foremost urban centers in the United States. As a part of greater Seattle, Redmond is characterized by a high quality of life. Remarkable natural beauty and abundant recreational opportunities combine with a vibrant economy. Seattle's enviable combination is epitomized in Redmond, a town now well known for being the corporate hometown of software giant Microsoft. This economic underpinning has contributed profoundly to the shape and outlook of the suburb’s new town center development.

Redmond Town Center’s site is valuable for its proximity to major thoroughfares, and also for its natural and scenic quality. The 120 acre parcel lies next to Route 520, an east-west connector which links downtown Seattle with suburbs such as Bellevue, Redmond and points east. (Fig. 29) As traffic along this route began to increase in the late 1970s, the land became prized for its visibility and accessibility. When commercial development ideas were first broached, it seemed ideal as a location for a traditional regional mall. However, this approach conflicted with a desire on behalf of the town’s residents to retain a small-town character. Redmond was in some respects caught in a web of regional economic success, wanting to benefit from prosperity without sacrificing natural recreational amenities and the pedestrian scale of its low-rise commercial core. A dilemma was how the land value could be tapped, without ruining all of its irre-}

Site and Project History
Redmond Town Center is being developed by the Winmar Company, Inc., a Seattle-based subsidiary of Safeco, an insurance company. Winmar has held a national reputation in the real estate industry for over 45 years as a developer, owner and manager of regional shopping centers, office buildings, and commercial and business parks. Redmond Town Center is Winmar’s fourth major retail development in the Northwest.¹

Packaging the complex project has been a 19-year effort for Winmar since it bought the 120 acres, encompassing the old Redmond Golf Links, in 1978. The developer originally had in mind a conventional, enclosed super-regional mall with four department store anchors. After the Redmond City Council gave conditional approval for the project in 1988, Winmar signed up Frederick & Nelson, The Bon Marche, Nordstrom and J.C. Penney as anchors. But the project fell apart in a national wave of department store financial trouble. The Bon Marche’s parent the retail market. They observed that one of suburbia’s most distinctive creations was becoming a
thing of the past. Company vice president Randy Kyte recalled, “We went to a convention and saw the demise of the regional mall industry before our very eyes. The only people who were in the game were expanding already-strong regional malls. The people who were talking about new regional centers were mostly blowing smoke.” A new trend they spotted was to have shopping centers which were smaller than regional malls, with powerful “mini-anchor” draws such as the Gap, instead of department stores. 

In summer 1992, Winmar executives Kyte and Dave Stedman joined a friend, architect Walt Niehoff, for a breakfast. Conversation turned to the Redmond parcel, and blossomed into an idea to drop the mall at Redmond, and build a new town center. (Fig. 30) By the end of the meal they had sketched the concept on the back of a placemat. Niehoff, a principal in LMN Architects (Seattle-based Loschky, Marquardt and Nesholm), later became project architect.

When the developer and architect began to talk about open air and the weaving of new streets with old ones, city support for the project began to grow. Winmar vice president Dave Stedman reflected, “I think that’s where the partnership with the city really began.” The town center’s design approach became an intensive process that involved the collaborative efforts of city planners, retail specialists, architects, engineers, landscape designers, traffic consultants, and land use experts. The goal was to develop a strategy for development that addressed urban integration, project scale, parking, traffic, market changes, environmental issues, and engineering concerns. A consensus emerged from these activities, resulting in an open-air, multi-use center with public plazas and landscaping, rather than the typical — and originally proposed — enclosed shopping mall.

Redmond Town Center’s first phase opened in summer 1997. The project is expected to reach completion by 1999. The original schedule of eight years for full build-out and tenanting has shrunk to less than five. Winmar’s Randy Kyte declared, “We blew the timeline away.” Of the office component, Kyte explained, “In 1993, people thought we were crazy, then AT&T Wireless showed up and took it all.”

Market
As of 1996, Redmond had grown to have more jobs than its 42,000 residents, giving it a demographic characteristic as an “Edge City.” The growth spurt entailed more than 15,000 new jobs in two years, increasing employment by more than a third. City planners reflected that given the extent of construction in the pipeline, 5 million square feet, the city was headed to having more office development in the works than downtown Washington DC or Miami. There were
two ways to view this explosion. In one perspective, the once-rural community was on the verge of cementing its position in the international marketplace, locking up a stellar future with high-paying jobs aplenty. A contrasting viewpoint held that Redmond was on the verge of sacrificing the hometown charm that had attracted residents decades ago.8

City Councilman Richard Grubb remarked, “With so much coming so quickly, we have no way of knowing how it will change the community... As you get bigger and bigger, people begin to feel less connected.” What was coming to the city was still more of what had already rocketed Redmond into the regional economic stratosphere: software companies, light manufacturing, and R&D firms exploring biotechnology, space technology, electronics and avionics. Prominent “tech” companies headquartered there include Microsoft, Nintendo and AT&T Wireless Services. City planners had expected a 76 percent increase in jobs by 2012, but the surge was happening virtually all at once. The forecast had shifted such that by 2012, when population was projected to be 51,470, there would be an additional 17,000 jobs, totaling over 68,000. By then traffic was expected to increase from between 41 and 91 percent, in various neighborhoods of Redmond.9

With so much money, jobs, traffic and people flooding the market, Redmond was a prime locale for creating a dense commercial project. But the socially progressive and environmentally conscious community demanded a well-crafted, rather than schlocky, development. With town input and developer inspiration the result was a project in the new Main Street/Town Center mode. Since Redmond Town Center and in the fertile ground of the Pacific northwest the project’s architecture firm has made this type of development a specialty, engaging in four more town center projects.10 Given the expertise garnered by LMN Architects it is valuable to hear their worms-eye enumeration of the forces contributing to demand for MS/TC projects:

“First, it has become evident that people have begun to seek places where they can interact casually — environments more relaxed than the office or the mall. Additionally, small retailers have found that they can be successful without being located in a mall anchored by huge department stores. They are discovering, in other words, the benefit of “main street” locations where a nearby cinema or popular restaurant provide the best anchors. With the developments [such as Redmond Town Center] and others, society has begun to turn away from a fifty year tradition of suburban sprawl. Communities desire a focal point for activity with a sense of neighborhood identity. At the same time, traffic everywhere is getting worse. As commuting time to the city grows longer, having direct access to a broad range of amenities, such as retail, residential, office and entertainment, becomes increasingly attractive. Finally, shopping habits have changed. Not only do people have less time to shop, but, when they do, they want to be entertained. A stimulating environment that provides a variety of experiences and a
place “to see and be seen” has become the preferred option, especially when it includes small, conveniently located specialty retailing centers.”

The project responded to the local market context by including a substantial component — over 500,000 square feet — of Class A office space. Almost all was leased to AT&T Wireless. Redmond Town Center attracted the company by providing an opportunity completely to re-address its facilities needs at the heart of the hot market. These requirements encompass not only such features as state-of-the-art infrastructure internal to the buildings, but also the lifestyle amenities afforded by the larger development, like lunchtime concerts, a full complement of retail, and the adjacent trail and park system. (Fig. 31) Suburban office parks of an earlier era have often had attractive landscaping, perhaps with a jogging trail through woods and around a waterway. But at Redmond, employees will be able to enjoy that active and passive recreation as well as the proximity to the commercial services, without having to jump in a car. This rare combination is likely to be especially attractive in a competitive employment environment. AT&T Wireless’s facilities director, Heidi Jung, summarized, “It’s kinda what you dream about when you’re in facilities — the chance to start with a clean slate and create the ultimate corporate environment for your company and its employees.”

Trent McGuire, a spokesman for AT&T Wireless, was equally excited about the company’s move. “Here at Carillon Point [the old headquarters] it’s beautiful, and while you don’t get views like this at many corporate campuses, it’s not like you can go downstairs to the drugstore. You have to get in your car and drive away. At Redmond Town Center you can do almost everything, including day care.”

Another emerging element of the Redmond market is short- and medium-stay residences, to meet the need for housing generated by business-related travel to the town (as opposed to permanent residence there). In summer 1997, Winmar announced plans to introduce 200 apartment units, tentatively planned to market to temporary residents who are in town for three to six months to do business with Microsoft, et al. These apartments, positioned to the luxury market, will be built adjacent to a six-story, 175-room Residence Inn by Marriott.

Though the apartment component would enlarge the size of the Town Center to 1.6 million square feet — the kind of number which often provokes anti-development outcry — this increase was not uninvited. Redmond’s planners welcomed the apartments. “Actually,” said city planner Judd Black, “we’re looking forward to having some housing at the site. It will add some vitality to the area.” The inclusion was warmly received because it will help the mixed-use development from becoming a ghost town when offices and stores shut down for the evening. Officials hoped that having residents to stroll through the streets, parks and nearby trails would augment a sense of community for the city’s downtown. “I think there’s a lot of people who
would sat it’s a good thing,” reiterated Councilwoman Nancy McCormick.14

From a retail perspective, Redmond Town Center targets five market segments:

1. Local residents, for convenient shopping;
2. The intercept market passing by on Route 520 to other centers and malls;
3. Off-site office workers, such as those from Microsoft and Nintendo;
4. The more than 3,000 on-site office workers; and
5. People seeking entertainment, either passive (e.g. watching a movie or dining out) or active (e.g. recreational activity in the 44-acre preserve).15

To serve this composite audience the resulting tenant mix comprises, among others, a Barnes & Noble Bookstore, many clothing stores including a cluster of shops in the Limited company’s family (Abercrombie & Fitch, Express, Bath & Body Works, et al.), a beauty spa, a commercial art gallery, burger and bagel joints as well as sit-down bistros. Forthcoming are both a flagship REI outdoor-goods store, and a grocery, which will be full-service but carry a plentiful stock of fresh prepared foods for sale to customers for whom time commands a premium. A children’s center combining day care, play and learning typifies the center’s positioning to Redmond’s educated and busy but recreational demographic market.

There are potential problems relating to Redmond Town Center’s retail tenanting strategy, especially in its first phase. One is, whether the predominantly upscale nature is too high even for Redmond; it is higher than the positioning was for previous mall plans.16 However, the developers believe this mix is appropriate to a market where in 1997 the average annual household income was over $65,000. In addition, Winmar contends the town center will not be so exclusive that families cannot come for an ice cream, or a stroll along Bear Creek in the preserved open space. Another possible conflict is the balance between major retailers, and convenience-oriented shops and services. A project retail consultant, J’Amy Owens of the Retail Group, was concerned that there were not enough convenience/service facilities in the initial phase’s lineup. This issue may simply have to play out over time, since there is no obvious formula to tenant this prototype, positioned to both regional and community markets. When the project is finished any imbalance may be rectified as the full complement of community shops including the grocery becomes available.17

The unconventional mix may prove to succeed in part because the project is not in a vacuum; its retail component intentionally adds to the existing downtown facilities. In its first year of business the combination apparently has operated well in conjunction with old Redmond. City planning manager Judd Black observed, “There were a lot of fears that the center would be the gorilla that would suck the energy from downtown....What I’ve seen is that the businesses
(outside the center) are pleased with the cross traffic. I haven’t seen buildings downtown losing their tenants. We’re not getting high vacancy rates.”

Physical Configuration
Before any ground could be broken, the project had to satisfy requirements regarding its treatment of the natural environment. (Fig. 32) The former golf course site contains a slough [marshy waterway] and salmon spawning creek, which runs alongside Route 520. This habitat backs onto Marymoor State Park on the other side of the highway. Though the State Route slices through this natural space the parklands are connected by bridges and trails. Preservation of open space was a major consideration in the public planning process which followed the earlier mall plans. Among other citizens, a local tribe of native Americans participated with authority because of its rights pertaining to the salmon habitat. The resulting design reconfigures built space into a more densely packed layout, including structured parking, which is situated at the edge of the parcel closest to the existing town. (Fig. 33) This is different than the old proposed mall, which would have been centered in the parcel, and ringed on all sides by surface parking — thereby consuming more open space and edging dangerously closely onto the waterway. In total, forty-three acres of the parcel will be kept as permanent open space, with trails connecting to the Sammamish Slough and Burke-Gilman trails. One question which remains unanswered is whether the development’s drainage systems will prevent runoff from polluting the salmon spawning area. It is more certain that the open space will satisfy human recreational desires.

Redmond Town Center intentionally integrates well with the preexisting street framework, down to the very naming of the streets, which continues the town’s numbered street grid. The project utilizes Redmond’s fabric of streets and blocks to extend the old downtown toward the project’s hard edge — the open space corridor and state highway to the south. The system matches street widths and use of sidewalks. But the integration is not seamless. First, there is a Burlington Northern freight railway line which separates the new parcel from old Redmond. The tracks are crossed in two places, by 166th and 170th Streets, which link old with new. However the tissue of the existing downtown is somewhat frayed next to the rail, because of a triangular clash with the orthogonal streets and because there are irregular light industrial parcels abutting the rail. As such neither 164th nor 168th Streets traverse the tracks so there is still a measure of separation. Yet Redmond Town Center’s own streets network aligns with where these streets would come across, if they are eventually cut. To strengthen the connection it would seem helpful in particular to elongate 164th Street, which would allow auto circulation in a loop through the center’s main plaza. Even in the absence of a fully interwoven circulation system, the street corridor views help unify the old and new areas. (Fig. 34)
Between old and new districts, there is a slight shift in scale; Redmond Town Center’s buildings are larger and actually have a stronger street orientation, than do the smaller, older buildings. The new structures’ relatively uniform massing and setbacks probably make them more tenable as an addition to the older district, in which the smaller buildings are in places scattered and deeply set back within the blocks. In fact old Redmond does not really have a frontally-oriented quintessential main street axis. Redmond Town Center’s structures scale down vertically from five stories in some office buildings — furthest away from old downtown — to three or two stories where the new project abuts older two- or one-story structures.

Architecturally, Redmond Town Center’s retail, office and parking structures possess a harmonious facade treatment which makes them perceptibly integrated. They utilize pre-fabricated brick and precast concrete materials, and have similar floor heights, window treatments, landscaping, and so on. The residential and hotel exteriors have not yet been designed but apparently will be of a similar idiom. The developer has sought not to make an innovative architectural gesture, but rather to take inspiration from Redmond’s 1920’s brick buildings.

The blocks are designed to support pedestrian activity. Street level facades have generous storefront windows, canopies, and small-scale details. Trees, decorative gas-lamp style lighting, banners, and perpendicular blade signs make up the street furniture. Covered walkways and awnings are intended to create intimate places in order to invite visitors to stop for a conversation or closer look. The pedestrian-friendly treatment is extended in a heavily-landscaped walkway which juts south of the central plaza through surface parking, connecting it with a cluster of two freestanding restaurants which overlook the park. As is evident in the site plan, the restaurants are really just peripheral “pads” surrounded mostly by roads and parking. What distinguishes them from run-of-the-mill pad restaurants is that they have been grouped together with a garden forecourt in between for clement weather dining and that they can be reached on foot via a pleasant shrub- and bench-lined walkway which is slightly elevated from the surrounding pavement. (Fig. 35) The restaurants are chain establishments albeit newcomers to the Seattle market; the pleasant pedestrian setting enhances their attractiveness.

The centerpiece of the street network is the circular Center Plaza, with its public space icon, the Three Bears Fountain. (Fig. 36-37) This fixture is designed to be played in, by children: jets of water shoot up from spigots flush against the brick pavement, and the bronze bear sculptures — two cubs playing by a mama who has just nabbed a salmon, presumably from nearby Bear Creek — are small enough to climb. This circular space is ringed by a balcony, which connects the second stories of the retail and service businesses on either side of the main street. The area
affords good views of the public interaction, either from upstairs or from the benches, steps
and cafe tables around the fountain. (Fig. 38)

The bears fountain — in which children really do frolic — is a poignant testimony to Redmond
Town Center’s attempt to marry social, economic and environmental considerations. The former
head pro of Redmond Golf Links, the 18-hole course which used to occupy the site, was among
these who decried the development of the land. “It’s a tragedy, an environmental disaster,” he
lamented, reflecting that the bears to spot today are neither black, brown, nor grizzly, but bronze.19
There is a more cynical, less passionate critique about the fountain, which illustrates that not
every Redmondite is smiling about the outdoor treatment of public space. Anecdotally, a local
developer remarked, “Does Seattle really need more water? Think about it. I was up there
shopping last Christmas, it was drizzling and really dreary. I come into this circular plaza, and
there’s the fountain, splashing more water all over the place. It looked really ridiculous.”20
Redmond Town Center is banking that most of its market will take the weather as it comes, and
enjoy the invigoration, judging by a quip on a center advertising banner: “Clothes shield you
from the sun, shelter you from the cold, and spare you from staying indoors.”

The pedestrian areas are facilitated by parking, accommodated for in 1,500 spaces. There are
unmetered on-street parallel parking spaces to invite convenient access, but most are tucked
out of sight. One three-story central parking structure has been located behind, and is wrapped
on three sides by, commercial space. This disposition suits well for the visibility and access
requirements of the larger retail stores (“mini-anchors”), such as Eddie Bauer, whose space
stretches to full height in the building. Not only is there a pedestrian-oriented entrance on the
ground floor, accessible from the main street sidewalk, but there is also a drive-up auto-ori-
ented entrance, on the upper deck of the parking structure which functions in the same fashion
as the parking-aproned entrances of conventional strip centers. (Fig. 39) These garage-side
entrances are more tastefully detailed and landscaped than typical garage entrances in regional
malls, and allow for larger signage. The partly-hidden structure, is separated from the shops by
fireproof concrete to meet code requirements and differentiated in color to achieve visual sepa-
ration.21 Another, three-story freestanding parking garage has retail space on the ground level.
This space — which does not front the main street — appears to have been handled appropri-
ately in leasing terms, by being tenanted with destination/service-oriented retail, such as a
custom framing shop. Both of the decks available for public parking connect to second-story
retail via overhead walkways, so those patrons stowing their cars on upper levels do not have
to waste time descending to reach the shopping zone. The office complex has an additional
1,000 spaces in a dedicated employee structured parking facility which is situated at the pe-
riphery of the project.
The office component has a campus layout. Most of the office space is leased to AT&T Wireless Services for its global headquarters. AT&T’s facilities have been built out in two phases: soon after construction commenced on the first phase, the firm exercised its option to lease remaining additional space in the center. The property totals 585,000 square feet occupying six free-standing office buildings. AT&T’s complex is interconnected by canopy-covered walkways and has an outdoor courtyard, reiterating the public space theme. In massing, layout along the street grid, and facade detailing, these buildings harmonize with the center’s other structures. These properties are grouped in the southern zone of the overall development, which affords them some separation such that the headquarters still maintains a campus feel. When both phases are complete, the AT&T campus will occupy 40 percent of the 120 acre Redmond Town Center. The Lake Washington School District Administration and Resource Center is the second-largest office tenant on site, occupying 60,000 square feet in a building also at an edge of the site to the west, opposite the park.22

At the project’s northern end, the apartment building and hotel will give a more urban, 24-hour use pattern to the development. In this same sector are two entertainment facilities — the cinema, and a micro-brew pub which is still under development. Redmond Town Center’s southern end, in contrast, will be somewhat more suburban in its use pattern and surface parking-fronted layout, with the eventual addition of a grocery store at the perimeter of the site. This zonal layout illustrates Redmond Town Center’s strategy of differentiating spaces among the integrated whole, in order to cater to the needs of its several target markets.

Though Redmond Town Center is adjacent to the heavily-traveled Route 520, it is not possible to turn off the roadway and immediately enter a parking lot. Cars must exit the highway, and loop 180° around the park, entering the town of Redmond through a thick stand of trees along Leary Way. At that juncture, it is possible to turn into the new center, or continue straight into the old downtown. The approach has a rustic feel, because amidst the evergreens cars pass a large rough-hewn wooden aedicule used for a weekend farmer’s market, as well as the century-old shingled structure which was once the golf course’s clubhouse. This is certainly a back-door approach relative to conventional commercial development. Redmond Town center’s promotional signs are small, and the physical configuration itself does not communicate the usual non-verbal cues which normally shout, “Big, Free Parking!”. This aspect is very interesting. On the one hand, it suggests tremendous risk to the developer, who has seemingly abandoned the time-tested rules for suburban commercial development of prominent visibility and straight-shot access. On the other, because the public participated in the design process it suggests that the market itself is ready to call a truce and pledge patronage to more attractive
destinations of a less advertising-saturated nature. Of course, with the captive on-site office worker market proffered by AT&T Wireless there is a baseline of traffic to the center, regardless of the lack of verbal and non-verbal signs.

**Management**

Maintenance and programming of the public spaces in Redmond Town Center do not appear to pose extraordinary challenges. The streets are owned by the town, while the sidewalks, arcades and plazas/courtyards are owned by Winmar. There are not currently many plans for active programming of the hardscaped space. Instead, much of the interaction will be laissez-faire, owing to the commercial components — for example, sitting at outdoor café and restaurant tables, or window-shopping before a movie. Center Plaza’s fountain is a draw which must be maintained, but not programmed in the sense of special events. Redmond Town Center is taking commercial advantage of the park’s recreational opportunities, by supplying showers in the office buildings (an amenity priced into the lease) and placing a bike and skate shop near the entrance into the development from the trailhead. The property managers apparently are paying attention to detail: in July 1998, they were setting up a free towel facility to dry off wet kids at the Three Bears Fountain.

The land, buildings and leases are owned by Winmar, which as of summer 1998 is for sale by its parent company, Safeco Properties. Safeco envisions cashing out of the project, which will be fully built out within the next year, to a single buyer. In its current financial climate Redmond Town Center seems like it can set management cruise control. When things change, the owners might end up having to fight battles against the older downtown for tenants.

**Summary**

Redmond Town Center has capitalized on a rare opportunity — the town’s exceptional growth. The chance to lease most of its 500,000-plus square feet of office to a single tenant has afforded the development with the good fortune of reaching build-out ahead of schedule, reducing its financial risk and accelerating its returns. But the development process was not a cake-walk. The property owners shouldered carrying costs for nearly twenty years, and the idea to develop the new town center was largely a product of the developer’s insight and expertise. Redmond Town Center exemplifies the evolving mixed-use suburban prototype in its reaction to a changing retail climate, where upon reflection the highest and best use of a prime site was not a formulaic mall but instead an innovative combination of components laid out to complement, rather than compete with, existing adjacent development.
Chapter 2: CASE STUDIES

Redmond Town Center

1 AT&T Wireless web site/att.com.
3 "Town Center: Losing Planned Anchor Stores Was a Beginning, Not an End."
4 "Town Center: Losing Planned Anchor Stores Was a Beginning, Not an End."
6 "Town Center: Losing Planned Anchor Stores Was a Beginning, Not an End."
7 Clair Enlow, "Winning the Heart of an Edge City: Redmond Town Center Goes the Mall One Better."
8 Sarah Lopez Williams, "Redmond Just Grows...and Grows," Seattle Times, local news section, 11/21/96.
9 "Redmond Just Grows...and Grows."
10 These include Peterkort Station, a transit-oriented, multi-use development in Portland, Oregon.
12 Web site for Sellen Construction Company/sellen.com
13 "Town Center: Losing Planned Anchor Stores Was a Beginning, Not an End."
16 An early mall concept had proposed a low- to mid-market Mervyn's in lieu of Nordstrom.
Redmond is situated in the booming Eastside of Seattle. (Fig. 29)

The AT&T office buildings afford wooded landscaping as well as immediate proximity to the center's complement of retail, service and entertainment amenities. (Fig. 31)
Redmond Town Center uses a street system to connect the with older downtown to its north, and a trail system to link with the surrounding parks and preserved habitat. Route 520 runs at bottom. (Fig. 30)
Bird's eye view of the new town center against a backdrop of evergreen woods. The AT&T Wireless office campus occupies the two sets of three buildings symmetrically disposed around the surface parking and pad restaurants at left. The circular plaza and diagonal main road are the main retail/entertainment focus, though more facilities are to the lower right and also out of view below. Right of the circle is the structured parking deck wrapped on three sides. Upper right is the hotel/apartment sector. Freight railroad tracks edge the project at right. (Fig. 32)
These street names illustrate the juxtaposition of the grid road system with the adjacent open space and wildlife habitat. (Fig. 33)

View from the hotel/brew pub area, north into downtown Redmond. The older buildings across the tracks are smaller, but between old and new there is a congruent feel. (Fig. 34)

The tree-lined connection between the central plaza space and the pad restaurants (roofs visible in the background) invites walking. Benches provide a pleasant space to await a companion or to eat lunch. (Fig. 35)
Chapter 2: CASE STUDIES

Redmond Town Center

Frolicking in the Three Bears Fountain. (Fig. 36)

Center Street Plaza is ringed by a walkway which connects retail, parking and entertainment uses. The structure is also a type of monumental archway, but instead of being an entrance gateway, denotes the heart of the site. (Fig. 37)
Redmond Town Center

The playful arena of Center Plaza is only a block distant from one of the AT&T Wireless buildings, under construction in the background. (Fig. 38)

The larger two-story shops are accessible directly from the parking deck, to increase accessibility. This is neither the “front” nor “back” entrance but one of a choice, depending on whether the customer arrives by car or foot. This hybrid layout illustrates Redmond Town Center’s design response to a market challenge of serving multiple commercial and social needs. (Fig. 39)
Chapter 3: THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL REFLECTION

This chapter presents theoretical and practical reflections as a further assessment of the new Main Street/Town Center development prototype. Spelled out in a register of social, functional, economic, and financial factors, this synthesized context helps communicate how a cross-cutting set of factors, such as physical form, market and commercial obsolescence, are interrelating to create the MS/TC’s revolutionary style of suburban development.

These reflections combine theory with observations gleaned from the case studies in Chapter Two, to help mold answers to the thesis questions: What are the circumstances in which a public space-anchored, or street-making, approach is successful in suburban commercial development? As a developer, how would one employ this prototype to capitalize on the applicable market and design circumstances? And, what is the prospect for a public space/street-anchored type of commercial development?

The factors are discussed in a sort of interview-respondent layout. Concepts which arose before the case studies were examined are in regular typeface, while concepts which generated after the case studies are in italics.

Social Factors

The “Third Place”

Amidst a world of impersonal computers and high-tech gadgetry, increasingly many people are seeking a more simple lifestyle which emphasizes family, friends, values and experiences. This experience may occur in what has been termed the Third Place: the first being home, the second being workplace or school, and the third being the public space of community interaction. This place is lacking in many neighborhoods and many people’s lives.\(^1\)

Despite the subjectivity of this factor, creating the “third place” has proven to be of objective benefit in real estate developments. One important conclusion drawn from Redmond Town Center and Mizner Park is that community space need not be situated within walking distance of the home. Public space
is attractive even when the folks you meet face-to-face are strangers. Making a “third place” doesn’t have to be romantically small-town.

The Main Street Precedent

The traditional Main Street was a social, economic and design construct — a place where a community’s activities congregated visibly along a domain of public space. Commercial activity, in the form of both retail and civic services, created a vital nexus for more informal community interaction. The National Trust for Historic Preservation, which supports a program to revitalize traditional main streets, provides a synopsis of the original model:

“Before World War II, Main Street was the community’s primary commercial hub. Downtown buildings usually had several tenants — typically a ground-floor retailer and, frequently, several upper-floor offices or apartments; together, these tenants provided enough rent for property owners to keep their buildings in good condition. The presence of the post office, library, banks and local government offices added to the steady flow of people downtown. Not only was Main Street the center of the community’s commercial life, it was also an important part of its social life; people thronged the street on Saturday nights to meet friends, see a movie and window shop.”

Eventually newer development prototypes, including the regional mall and suburban office park, eclipsed the old-style Main Street. This shift resulted from an almost infinite number of development policies and economic realities, including the creation of the interstate highway system and the evolution of production and distribution efficiencies. Such changes over the decades have helped to boost substantially the standard of living of many Americans. However, there is arguably a quality of life factor which has diminished since the waning of the old Main Street.

The question for new projects is how to capture beneficial social attributes of the Main Street, while meeting contemporary needs for financing, leasing and marketing. Quaint examples, such as preserved Nantucket and freshly-minted Seaside (the vaunted neotraditional community designed by Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk), do not map very convincingly onto the average suburban town. Envision a Seaside gourmet food store, where high prices can help solve problems of limited physical access and potentially low volume: these locales are extraordinary, highly affluent resort towns. The MS/TC seeks to provide an opportunity to bridge this social gap, for an eager audience. The home-grown economic element is perhaps irrelevant to individuals, whereas the ability to people-watch is paramount. The MS/TC reinvents the main street mostly by creating physical space usable for pedestrian interaction. Some of the romantic ideals may fade — for
example, the stores might not be locally owned; these days the midafternoon watering hole is more than likely a Starbucks, not a drugstore soda fountain.

The old-fashioned Main Street was a primary location for civic amenities such as post offices, banks and town halls. These classic public-space landmarks served as traffic generators, attracting a broad representation of people. Given this precedent it seems that such civic buildings would be desirable in new Main Streets. In master-planned communities this might work, but in seasoned suburbs it is not necessarily feasible or essential to relocate municipal facilities. The traffic-generating role may be played instead by commercial facilities such as popular restaurants. Also, some of the monumentality of civic buildings has diminished since a more architecturally grand era circa 100 years ago. Perhaps their spatial framing role can be played now by fountains or pavilions, or forecourts to stores and offices.

Real Estate Actuality and the Search for Public Space

The well-known New Urbanism movement seeks to develop communities with these Main Street social characteristics. Spearheaded by Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk and Peter Calthorpe, this visionary group of architects and planners has been active since the late 1980's. Much has been written both by and about the Congress for New Urbanism, but in short, their motivation is to recapture a "lost" sense of community and public space. In fact their desire is not only the domain of preservation and design professionals — it has become widely recognized and publicized in mainstream media. The popular opinion is a reaction to factors of modern American life, including alienation and commodification, an unfortunately long list. The MS/TC model capitalizes on the sentiment expressed by this preeminent urban design movement. But in contrast to that design-driven process, the MS/TC approaches development using a more viable commercially-driven process.

The New Urbanists' design philosophy is revealed in their charrette and manifesto approach, which illustrates their energy and dogmatic adherence to principle. The centerpiece of their ideology is the Traditional Neighborhood Development, or "TND." This prototype is predicated on residential fabric, in which densely-packed homes of mixed sizes front a street grid dotted with central public spaces. TND architecture is specified in great detail, with particular emphasis on porches for creating interaction between people sitting there, and those passing on the sidewalk. The MS/TC development type holds some of these aspects of scale and morphology in common, and similarly seeks to generate value (if possible at a premium), by the highly-integrated design of the public-space oriented project. Because MS/TC development focuses on meeting commercial needs it is less likely to execute awkward design gestures predicated on design philosophy. For example at
Redmond Town Center the developers have not been loathe to formulate a car access/parking design which in the upper level of peripheral structured parking decks mimics the format of asphalt-fronted “category killers.”

The New Urbanist projects have struggled to create a design for the commercial components of their projects which will fit the parameters of both real estate and public social interaction. Their projects have been rather weak with regard to commercial enterprises, perhaps because non-residential components have usually been considered secondary, or perhaps because the ideology includes some misguided notions. The Duany/Plater-Zyberk project at Kentlands, MD illustrates the attempt at integrating the residential neighborhood with a regional-scaled retail component. First they designed a mall with four department stores, linked on one end to the residential neighborhood but visible on the other from the arterial. The illustrations of this development depict a fanciful neoclassical architecture and Baroque layout which recalls European landmarks like upper Regent Street in London, and Blenheim Palace. (Fig. 40) Later they modified the plan using a more finely grained street network in which three parallel streets fan out through a surface parking sector (carved into blocks to facilitate future land development), and are anchored at their ends by freestanding department stores. These are interesting brainstorms but epitomize a New Urbanist tendency to overplay the importance of architectural style and underplay commercial logic. As subsequent development shows, the retail component at Kentlands actually supports not three to four department stores, but community retail, such as a grocery and hardware. The streetscape is being retrofitted with some pockets of inhabitable public space at the edges but is somewhat sketchy in execution. (Fig. 41)

Overall, the tensions between autos and pedestrians, and small and large scales, in mixing the commercial use are unresolved by the New Urbanists. This belief has been voiced by professionals, such as planner Jay Parker of HOH Associates in Virginia, who was quoted in a 1992 Urban Land article, “Neotraditional Town Planning: The Test of the Marketplace.” Said Parker, “Internalized retail is a real flaw in neotraditionalist [New Urbanist] thinking and is perhaps the greatest challenge facing the concept.” A more satisfactory resolution entails critical enquiry of commercial space needs, to see how the desire for public space may work hand-in-hand with the forces on profit-seeking businesses.

The 24-Hour Downtown

Compared to the old Main Street, the “24-hour model” of contemporary downtowns is a newer model of vibrant economic and social interaction. This term, which has come to be used within the real estate industry, is one of a few shorthand terms to express broad categories of cities.
Paramount examples of this model are San Francisco, New York, Seattle, Chicago, Washington DC, and Boston. Its hallmarks include a pedestrian-friendly and transit-linked circulation system, and a coherent street and neighborhood pattern. There is a high degree of mixture of uses, including residential and entertainment, which lends the model its name. These cites have an “imageable” profile, such as literally may be portrayed in signature imagery such as the Golden Gate Bridge or Manhattan skyline. This renowned sense of place is echoed at ground level by a rich set of amenities, which lends breadth and depth to the type of experiences to be enjoyed there. Put simply, the 24-hour city boasts a lot to see and a lot to do, in a setting that’s never dull.

As described in a 1998 industry outlook survey published by ERE Yarmouth, the 24-Hour City’s attributes are beginning to yield a competitive advantage in the arena of commercial development and investment. The survey recommended these cities as the best locales for real estate investment. Moreover, it recommended that the best suburbs for investment are those which exemplify the 24-hour characteristics, citing the desirability of locating there by both companies and individuals. In microcosm, the MS/TC also exhibits these 24-hour city characteristics and as such is an intelligent response to the demand. It is interesting to note that in this context, the sometimes-opposite perspectives of development and urban design are aligned. This alignment bodes well for the long-term value of the MS/TC. Given their newness, to date, MS/TC projects have been constrained in layout and total size. The public space-anchored strategy will guide these projects as they evolve with the 24-hour market, but in turn this maturation will create new functional challenges.

The Residential Component

Suburban commercial development inherently rejects inclusion of residential components, and even multi-family commercial investments are usually spatially separated from other uses. Yet socially there is a demand for a wider variety of living options — a demand which may be increasing for reasons such as a rising number of smaller, non-nuclear family household units. Development types such as suites hotels, short-stay and regular-stay apartments, and senior congregate housing are technically commercial but programmatically residential and thus could be attractive components in a mixed-use suburban project. The MS/TC has residential components as a seeming prerequisite, even though the prototype’s roots are in the retail sector.
Functional Factors

*How Public Space Can Function as an Anchor*

This thesis relies on the definitions of “public space” and “anchor” set out below:

Public Space: There is no singularly agreed-upon definition of public space. One definition interprets public space as outdoors — the land of a community between the private areas (buildings and lots). In classical form, primary public spaces are usually framed, for example by a collection of facades, so that the space has a coherent shape, with axes and/or central openings, plus palpable edges. Legalistic approaches to the term may refer to fee-simple ownership (does the municipality count the land among its own assets?) or to constitutionality of occupying the space (can a citizen engage in a civil protest there?). A more pragmatic definition may interpret public space as a place in which a good-humored patron can walk the dog, greet the neighbors and people-watch in peace, without having to pay a cover charge. There are many shades of grey in the concept; the roughness of edges to public space (for example, where cafe tables meet a sidewalk, or balconies overlook a park) contribute to its pleasure.

Anchor: In the traditional retail lexicon the anchor attracts customers to other components of the development, providing a commercial center of gravity and boosting their revenue-generating prospects. In a regional mall the anchor store typically pays relatively little money to the developer for the privilege of occupying that space; its lease is longer in years and more favorable, in financial terms to the lessee, than those of the satellite or in-line store. Its role is critical in creating and sustaining economic value, largely by guaranteeing foot-traffic and expenditures. This setup was not used or necessary in the organically-developed downtown or small town Main Street, but is used in large developments built speculatively and at once.

A major functional factor affecting use of the public space as an anchor is management. Whether the streets are owned and operated by a public or private entity, the space needs to meet the demands of tenants as well as the expectations of the public. This entails coordination and programming to leverage the space for multilateral benefit. There may be a delicate balance between the desired vibrancy of the space, which presumably makes it a draw, and the sterilized quality of ambiguously public/private spaces such as in malls. Security and cleanliness are probably prerequisites, however, standards need to be set sensibly -- for example, in deciding where to draw a line between relaxed enjoyment of public space, and misdemeanor loitering.
Traffic Circulation, Accessibility and Visibility

Suburban commercial development faces a conundrum in its reliance on the auto. This system of private circulation affords unprecedented freedom and opportunity, but can backfire when the street network is overloaded. This double-edged sword is apparent especially in “Edge Cities” — large-scale, predominantly commercial suburban areas. Many of these subcenters, originally prized for their convenient access, have become choked by ever-thickening traffic. Learning from Edge City congestion issues, the MS/TC tries to reconcile both the pros and cons of auto usage. The prototype’s contribution to solving this problem is an incremental gesture which could reduce, if only at the margin, the number of car trips taken by its office workers, residents and shoppers. Treatment of the car is in part a geometric puzzle.

A typical suburban commercial development requires access, visibility, and parking, as well as adequate square footage in a suitable floorplate. In the historical context of suburban development, with its horizontal expansion and Euclidean zoning, building types and site layouts have evolved in very efficient forms. Whether the type is a strip center or regional mall, suburban office park, or roadside franchise (e.g. restaurant, motel), the building is typically surrounded on several sides by its own surface parking, and directly accessible from a major arterial. The site is usually developed in isolation to surrounding projects, both in site planning terms, with a fence or berm as a barrier, and in terms of project ownership and financing. The fragmentation worsens traffic and can be annoying because it is often impossible to move among adjacent properties without a car.

Efficient shopping centers, office buildings, and chain hotels satisfy their own requirements with regard to access, visibility, parking and structure. But with individual project planning decisions made in isolation, the outcome is in most cases less than optimal. The conflicted pattern of parking and local pedestrian and auto circulation is a paramount example. Perhaps the worst locale for this kind of conflict is an area such as Buckhead, Atlanta -- a subcenter just dense enough that some pedestrian transportation is viable, but still firmly rooted in the suburban patterns such that cars are a practical necessity for most people who live, work and shop there. The problems related to parking and circulation are rife there, and familiar around the country. There are so many signs advertising shops, restaurants, hotels and other developments that sometimes it is hard to see them, among all the rest; they therefore lose some of their power as landmarks and begin to act as camouflage. Each individually-developed property has its own set of curb cuts, which can be difficult to navigate when you are unfamiliar; it is common to turn unwittingly into an exit lane, generating a head-to-head confrontation, and
also common to have a high speed car bump onto your tail as you quickly slow down to enter the cut, having just identified your destination amidst all the signs. For pedestrians, the high number of curb cuts makes walking dangerous; having sidewalks positioned immediately adjacent to the curbs exacerbates the danger and unpleasantness of walking. The amount of pavement creates glare and causes drainage problems. Left hand turn lanes can signal an infuriating wait, especially into a mid-block curb cut on the opposite side of the street. The irony is, that the devotion to auto circulation does not necessarily make life more convenient, at high traffic times of day such as lunchtime. To move between an office, shop or restaurant as little as 3/4 of a mile away, is likely to take as long driving as it would walking -- perhaps 15 minutes -- between having to retrieve and park the car, and wait at congested intersections. Like oases in the desert, there are some tantalizingly large and underutilized parking lots, privately owned and operated by the community shopping centers, which employ security guards even in off-peak hours to prevent patrons of entertainment complexes across the street from parking there; the price for violating the center’s strict rule is towing.

The MS/TC seeks to configure buildings, streets and parking lots to satisfy all parties, supporting both commercial viability and public space. There is a well-established set of design elements for creating pedestrian-friendly space and circulation corridors. These include furnishing a habitable streetscape with benches, trees, lamps and banners. The pedestrian’s route is in the same corridor as the cars -- the two are not utterly separated. Intersections are widened to reduce the distance over which a pedestrian must travel to regain safe ground. Crosswalks in particular are surfaced with pavers in different colors relative to the remainder of the road to signal the walker’s path. Parking is critical and supplied to a conventional ratio but treated in a manner which keeps it from being an overwhelming “sea.” Where densities adequately increase land values parking is supplied in structured decks. The garages are either hidden mid-block or clad aesthetically and placed beyond the main locus of central open space. Street levels of garages which line pedestrian routes are devoted to human use (e.g. retail) or landscaping. Surface lots are smaller than the monolithic swath of parking which typically fronts suburban commercial development, and fit into a street/block pattern. Whether in garages or surface lots parking is usually allocated using a share system that reflects 24 hour use patterns. Heavy parking use by a long term lessee (namely, office) warrants providing dedicated parking, which may be placed at the periphery. Visibility requirements for commercial enterprises are accommodated by fronting streets -- this is made easier by the increased linear frontage of the street pattern. However and curiously there does not seem to be necessity for direct visibility or access from arterials of the interstate magnitude. This raises the question of whether the MS/TC is enough of a destination to survive in the long run off the likes of I-95.

Transit Access
CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL REFLECTION

The impulse to escape gridlock suggests that the MS/TC may work well with transit access. The Transit-Oriented Development, or “TOD,” is another permutation of the New Urbanist design prototype, championed by Peter Calthorpe. The TOD is similar to the Traditional Neighborhood Development but has as its essence a central connection with a regional transit system. Like the TNDs, these designs are thought-provoking. Even though not many have actually been developed, the design fabric of a TOD illustrates the promise afforded by a street-making infill development. For example, Calthorpe’s scheme for University Town Center in San Diego is a comparative plan showing how to infill a shopping mall parking lot to create a pedestrian environment between the TOD’s transit stop and mall.\(^\text{10}\) (Fig. 42)

*It is very interesting to note that despite this theoretical potential for transit orientation, major links to public transit appear not to be crucial in developing the MS/TC. None of the three case studies is on a passenger rail line. It seems that in the real world, suburban commercial development is more about addressing problems of where to put the car, while transit connection is an optional extra or future phase. (Fig. 43)*

**Economic Factors**

*Optimizing Land Value*

To optimize land value, better choices for the public good tend to be made when decision-making is extended beyond the scope of an individual development entity. This can take place via contractual agreement, or when a governmental or semi-governmental authority is involved.\(^\text{11}\) MS/TC developments are developed and controlled by central entities -- a master planner or a public-private partnership. The optimizing factor suggests that such projects will escalate land value compared to development by piecemeal process.

This dynamic is illustrated in the previously described Buckhead, Atlanta example, which relates observations on traffic, parking, and related practical problems facing the developer. In the Buckhead scenario the community retail center, built according to its efficient design prototype, has ample parking directly accessible from the arterial. This surface lot is more than likely never full, with the possible exception of a day or two before Thanksgiving and Christmas, and often is well below 50% full. In theory, there “should be” ample space for the patrons of the adjacent entertainment complex (restaurants and nightclubs) to park there -- especially since its peak hours do not overlap with those of the community center. This would increase convenience, reduce land consumption and lower costs.
It is easy to lament this shortcoming in urbanistic harmony, but how can a developer/investor be expected to pay for something (e.g. off-street parking) which will benefit another? This is a basic free-loader externality problem. In a world of isolated decision-making, the respective entities have not brought to bear the advantages of cooperation. And even if they did, a site planning quandary persists. Situated in the middle of a block, the parking lot cannot be accessed in a direct line from the entertainment complex, without having pedestrians cross the middle of a busy road. These issues could well be addressed by coordinating development, which would employ street-making geometry and contractual agreement, to multilateral advantage.

Retail Industry Changes

Retail real estate performance is highly relevant to the study of the new Main Street prototype. First, retail space is a substantial and highly visible component of the model. Second, many of the actual projects -- including the three cases studies -- evolved specifically in response to a drastically changed local retail market. For example, Mizner Park in Boca Raton exists on the site of a razed, obsolete regional mall. To counter these changes, and exploit them, the MS/TC is supplying a new version of a retail center, which is a primary generator of the model's physical and programmatic form.

One major issue in the transforming retail industry is the changing ratio of expenditure by Americans. Fewer dollars are going to durable goods, while greater dollars are being spent on items such as personal services, entertainment, travel and recreation. In response to this dropoff, a recent trend has been to redevelop existing retail centers, which were once geared almost purely to sales of goods, with a greater entertainment component, such as cinemas and theme restaurants. The MS/TC furthers this strategy by combining a retail component of substantially fewer square feet than in a regional mall -- perhaps a few hundred thousand feet -- with a greater ratio of restaurants, cinemas, and cultural attractions. Some of the tenants, such as the forthcoming REI in Redmond Town Center, are retailers with a progressive product line which offers classes and outings, as well as goods with which to fill your house. The development’s entertainment experience is enhanced by the provision of public space for congregation and relaxation — in streetfront benches, fountains, plazas and so on, which may be reached by a street grid or by trails.

Another issue which is destabilizing the retail industry is fierce competition. In the same way that Mom’n’Pop establishments have generally been bested (or ousted, depending on your opinion) by bigger retail chains, these chains themselves are undergoing consolidation. (Figs. 44-45) Economies of scale in purchasing and distribution allow large retailers such as Wal-Mart to
compete on price. General merchandiser Wal-Mart has a counterpart in “category killers,” the
megastores such as Home Depot, Sports Authority, Circuit City, PetSmart, and Office Max which
have become increasingly dominant through the 1990s. These stores are called “big box” retail,
and the name is a double entendre. Not only are the items sold there likely to come in big boxes
(especially true for items from wholesale clubs such as Costco — buying a year’s worth of
Goldfish crackers in one trip), but the buildings themselves are big boxes.

The MS/TC retail strategy is to try to sidestep these competitive forces of cost-cutting and sales
volume. The public-space anchored development seeks to position its stores to meet the needs
of different market niches, such as upscale/unique (art galleries, couture — as at Mizner Park),
or service-oriented (child learning center, spa — as at Redmond Town Center). This approach
presumably differentiates the development, possibly contributing to more security in the
marketplace, as long as the niche is sensibly catering to demand.

This counterpoint is expressed by the differences in the physical form between big boxes and new Main
Street developments. The former stores are tens of thousands of square feet in size, with a new Super
Wal-Mart model (whose slogan is “Lettuce, Lug Nuts and Lingerie”) at 200,000 sq. ft. MS/TC stores
may be from a few hundred to several thousand square feet, with less depth and a greater emphasis on
window edge visible to the pedestrian from the public spaces. The big boxes’ efficient design places maxi-
mum priority on smooth auto circulation, with large surface parking lots between the road and entrance.
There is an inarguable logic to this layout, but it comes arguably at the expense of obliterating public
space. The desire to combine uses and have public interaction persists even within these megastores,
which sometimes have small cafes within the industrially-styled interior. The MS/TS breaks the parcel
back down into smaller pieces, crossed by a street grid. Autos circulate through several routes, rather
then a wide funnel. Parking is accommodated in several sites, including on-street slots and structured
garages. In short, the smaller, differentiated enterprises occupy smaller, differentiated buildings.

A third issue redrawing the retail horizon is the advent of modes of shopping which entail no
face-to-face interaction between the retailer and consumer. These systems include catalog and
internet shopping, which many consumers find convenient. The added cost of parcel shipping
balances the savings in time and hassle for not having to make a shopping trip — plus, pur-
chases may be made around the clock. As Americans become more facile with using the internet,
and more comfortable making on-line credit card transactions, it seems inevitable that the pro-
portion of distance sales will grow. The threat of sapping away dollars casts some shadow over
sales projections and rent pro formas. In this environment, it makes sense that owners of retail real
estate would seek to have a short investment timeline, by developing cheap and simple properties, or
diversifying the investment portfolio and seeking synergy by mixing retail with other real estate types.
The big box model uses the first approach, whereas the MS/TC uses the second one.

These ongoing changes in the retail industry also contribute to uncertainty about the outcome of in the leasing choices by MS/TC projects. One question that has not been answered is, should the public-space anchored development compete with strong regional malls? Redmond Town Center, for example, has several stores such as the family of Limited shops (Abercrombie & Fitch, Express, Bath & Body Works, et al.) which are all present at nearby, traditional enclosed facilities. The developers have bet that the wealthy market can sustain two of these stores. Mizner Park, on the other hand, has pointedly opted not to engage in such competition, though its trade area, like Redmond’s, is wealthy. Presumably, a project’s managers would reposition the tenant mix in the case of poor performance. In that case, the question would be whether the MS/TC’s unique component of public space, and the attraction it affords, serves as a safety net in sustaining the value of the developer’s investment. More drastically, the owner would have to redeploy the space into another sector.

Financial Factors

Perception and Valuation of Common Amenities

From a bottom-line perspective it is critical to ask how public space will pay for itself. If this question is relevant for public-sector developers, it is certainly imperative for those in the private sector. The answer should help to shape the amount and type of public space amenities which are provided, and possibly dictate how they are funded and managed.

A 1994 study conducted by the Urban Land Institute lends credence to the notion that high-quality landscape, site planning, and amenities can contribute to both the real (financial) and perceived value of a project. Evidence drawn from 11 case studies led to the following conclusions, that amenities can:

1. Translate into increased financial returns for a project’s developers.
2. Give developers a competitive edge and increase the pace of a project’s completion.
3. Help developers win public support for a proposed project, especially in contentious situations.
4. Establish an image, identity, and sense of community for development projects.
5. Influence decisions to buy or rent in both residential or commercial markets.
6. Encompass, in the minds of residents and tenants, highly valued environmental protection
features.

7. Contribute substantially to the market’s perception of security, privacy, and place.
8. Increase the long-term value of a project as a financial investment in the minds of residents.
9. Contribute to employee productivity, morale, and job enjoyment.
10. By example cause other developers to adopt a higher standard of design.
11. Reduce the need for publicly funded improvements on site and off site.  

The ULI summarized that “residents and tenants almost universally perceive the project as a whole, not as a series of parts that can be measured individually. Users tend to value the total package and the sense of community or image projected through a combination of landscape and amenity features.” The research did not suggest that a project’s amenity features can overcome potentially fatal flaws, such as poor location or bad access. It also underscored that real estate development projects are most successful when all design elements are closely interrelated. According to this survey the public space amenity cannot be seen as a panacea, but can contribute to expediting development, and to fortifying the long-term value, of a project which is coherently planned and responds accurately to market demands.

It is interesting to examine how consistent the above conclusions are within a project. Evidence may be drawn from one of the ULI case studies — Reston Town Center, in Reston, VA, outside Washington DC. Though not examined in-depth in this thesis, this development is a leading example of the MS/TC prototype. For the ULI, Reston’s respondents indicated a mixed reaction to the value of the center’s site plan and landscape features. The general merchandise retailers were “less convinced” about the value of the public space, than were the entertainment-oriented tenants, such as the cinema and restaurants. However, there is more recent evidence at Reston in favor of highly valuing the public space, which comes from office tenants. In 1998, Andersen Consulting announced it would move to new space in Reston Town Center, consolidating from several downtown DC and suburban locations. According to local industry press, “even a lot of real estate brokers...were surprised by the news that Andersen would leapfrog Tysons Corner [a local Edge City] in favor of Reston Town Center.” An executive from Boston Properties, co-developer of the 18-story, 407,000 sq. ft. building, said Andersen “made a conscious decision to pay a slight premium to go to a 24-hour-a-day environment over a more traditional office environment.”

Financing Distinctions of Mixed-Use Developments

According to a theoretical assessment conducted in 1995 (by Lisa Burke, for a thesis at the MIT Center for Real Estate), there are four significant characteristics which differentiate mixed-use developments and create in them a basis for inherent strength. These are, (1) synergy, (2) diver-
sification, (3) development risk, and (4) physical flexibility for the redevelopment option. The projects benefited because the components — retail, office, hotel and residential — were able to augment each other's markets (e.g. hotel guests patronized the retail, and businesspeople coming to town for meetings at the office stayed in the hotel). Under unified equity ownership, the projects were able to reduce the volatility of their investment returns, since rents for the various components tended to move in different cycles over time. For example, if office rents were down, perhaps retail rents were up, and vice versa. Burke found that when developed by a single entity, which maintained operational control, the project was better able to respond to changes in the market, for example by converting between hotel and residential uses. On the downside, this centralized control bears the risk of causing severe financial damage due to poor management decisions. This damage had been realized in the case of the original Park Forest Shopping Center, when Sears was erected blocking roadway visibility to the center.

Writ large, Burke's conclusions are applicable to the MS/TC model. However, some of these financial advantages will pale, especially the diversification of returns, if conditions change -- if components are owned and operated by different entities.

Public Financing

Because of the positive public good which may be expected to generate from a MS/TC development, public financing can be an appropriate contribution. This financing can facilitate creation of the public space, including new streets, plazas or parks -- the critical loss-leader. The public municipality could pay for infrastructure directly, including construction and maintenance. Or, a public entity could participate in a partnership with the private developer, arranging debt at advantageous coupon rates. Setting up a Tax Increment Financing district would be one way to repay the bonds. The public entity may also pick up softer costs, such as special events programming necessary to stimulate the life of the public space. The public may further shoulder costs for locating civic facilities such as the village hall at Park Forest.

This public contribution is not vital to any given development. In some cases, for example, the management company can pay the common area maintenance, sponsor the outdoor concerts, and so on. The arrangement surely boils down to the specific project. Even the streets may be privately built and owned; this system may be necessary to circumvent regulatory obstacles such as street width or setbacks which are applicable to public rights-of-way but can be ignored on private property.
Phasing Strategy

Prudent phasing is critical to recoup the investment on public space, and avoid squandering its value as an anchor. As described above, the MS/TC appears to owe much of its strength to synergy – the financial and social vibrancy of the mixed uses. Therefore tenants ranging from shops to hotels, offices to residences are attracted by virtue of there being other uses in the project. It is perhaps not enough for a tenant to believe that eventually these other uses will be located alongside; certain types of use, especially retail, do not have years in which to begin enjoying the fruits of this synergy. It is easier to envision office as being an early entrant, given common lease lengths of three, five or more years; however, the developer is probably more likely to capture a rent premium if office space debuts around the time when other components come on line. Therefore, it makes most sense for each component not to be introduced sequentially, but rather for several different components to be developed in the first phase. This simultaneity will boost absorption, thereby accelerating receipt of returns.

The most critical piece to develop up-front is the central public space, for that is the physical linchpin of the project and seems to serve as a market-maker. With the circulation and open space systems designed, it should be a straightforward proposition to attract tenants; even in an innovative development type with which the tenant was unfamiliar, they could satisfy their curiosity about access, visibility, or other spatial requirements. Phasing for a retrofitting redevelopment, such as Downtown Park Forest, also demands focus on creating the public space. At Park Forest, the project began by taking a radical risky step, in demolishing structurally sound, but economically obsolete buildings. This gamble intended to prove to prospective tenants that the new Downtown was going ahead, in the ground -- not just on paper.

To gain a depth of mix, and to legitimize any public financing it would seem appropriate to introduce civic or non-profit cultural facilities in early phases. Park Forest is leading strong with these components as a way of generating traffic to woo retailers. But Mizner Park virtually eliminated this step, with the exception of the open-air performance arenas (gazebos and amphitheater). Its cartoon museum was a later addition and the other cultural draws, an art museum and theater, have not yet broken ground. Interestingly this omission has had no discernible effect on private investment returns, although it has created some ongoing discontent, in that some locals view they were misled in approving public financing for development of cultural facilities.

As soon as the central street, plaza or pavilion is built, it is likely to generate activity and public awareness, if only because of novelty. This enlivenment will help attract tenants amenable to a mixed-use development. Follow-on phases, in contrast, do not have such an obvious pattern.
Changes in Real Estate Finance

The MS/TC paradigm has flowered during the late 1990s -- a time which is currently being recognized as a revolution in the real estate industry, with widespread change affecting both financing and operations. These changes may exert both negative and positive pressures on the viability and desirability of the MS/TC development prototype.

The major factor in this purported revolution is the rise in power and market share of the public capital markets for debt and equity. On the debt side is CMBS (commercial mortgage-backed securities). As of 1998 the vast majority of CMBS consists of conduit loans, originated with the intent of securitization; CMBS achieves low coupon rates for borrowers, because of its emphasis on lender standardization and economies of scale in an atmosphere of competitiveness in the financial markets. This pressure seems to favor commodity-type projects, such as freestanding restaurants and gas stations, which are programatically much less complicated than the mixed-use type and have a more clear risk profile. It may be difficult for MS/TCs to take advantage of this type of financing; in that case such projects would have to seek more traditional sources of debt which may be more expensive and therefore demand higher returns than other suburban commercial developments.

On the other hand, the ascendant investment vehicle on the equity side may make complicated projects more viable. This vehicle is the REIT (real estate investment trust), a format in which operating companies themselves are securitized. REITs are typically involved in day-to-day management as well as ownership. Theoretically, a mixed-use, public-space anchored project could be developed, leased and programmed under the umbrella of a single REIT, enabling the development to take advantage of some financing economies. This notion of a master entity is congruent with the MS/TC with regard to integral aspects like project marketing, common area maintenance and coordinating tenant mix. With sound judgement, this control could help the project benefit from flexibility inherent in a mixed-use project, by responding to market dynamics in order to remain financially strong. It is conceivable that a REIT could specialize in creating MS/TCs as its signature real estate product, though this has not been the case yet. This prospect may end up being shaped by competitive forces on REITs at the Wall Street level. REITs have begun to participate in MS/TC development, for example at Reston Town Center, where REIT giant Equity Office Properties is an owner and manager.

It is not possible to draw any specific conclusions from these rapid real estate industry changes. However, it is valuable to recognize that there is a growing set of financing and operating structures which is presenting new options for packaging development deals.
Chapter 3: THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL REFLECTION


2 Naturally, the notion of a street implies a formal design aspect—a well-traveled axis along which this mix of activities is placed. A Town Center may fulfill the same role, but with a more nodal layout, which is less dependent upon the presence of a continuous thoroughfare. In either case, the main street and town center are recognizable as imageable hubs of a community’s existence. Commercial activity focuses there within the realm of central community landmarks.


5 The New Urbanist example which did lead with commercial enterprises (grocery store, bank, etc.) is another DPZ project, in Mashpee Commons, MA. This redevelopment expanded a failing strip center by introducing a street grid of a few blocks, with a landscaped pedestrian area.


7 The categories in this taxonomy include: 24-Hour Cities (e.g. New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Boston, Washington DC, Seattle); Suburban Agglomerations/auto-dominated (e.g. Atlanta, Phoenix, Los Angeles); and 9-5 Cities/ailing downtowns (e.g. Detroit, Philadelphia). Other cities such as Tampa, San Antonio and New Orleans are described as small-market or tourism-oriented cities.


9 Alex Achimore, “Putting the Community Back into Community Retail,” Urban Land Vol. 52, No. 8, August 1993, pp. 33-38.


14 Interview, Dave Steedman and Carolyn Fossum, Winmar Development/Safeco Properties, Seattle, WA, 7/13/98.


17 The cases included single family and multi-family residential communities, shopping centers, corporate office complexes and mixed-use developments.


19 “Valuing Landscape, Site Planning, and Amenities,” p. 43.


Below: a fanciful rendering for a regional retail complex (unbuilt) at Kentlands, MD, a Duany/Plater-Zyberk-designed development. The imagery recalls British neo-Baroque monuments, which are presumably kin to the neo-Georgian style of the project’s first residential phases. Right: the concept geared itself to the future by laying out surrounding parking in blocks suitable for systematic infill. (Fig. 40)

Left, atrocious fabrication of columns demeans the architectural imagery which intends to foster quality public space at Kentlands. Right, sidewalks to nowhere illustrate the clash between autos and pedestrians when the problem of joint circulation remains unsolved. (Fig. 41)
This before-and-after scheme by Peter Calthorpe for a Transit-Oriented Development at a mall in San Diego demonstrates theoretical potential for infilling surface lots in a walkable manner. This concept is far more likely to succeed, over the foreseeable time horizon, in urban settings rather than suburban ones, because of the comparative viability of mass transit. The black arc in the lower diagram represents a radius from a transit stop. (Fig. 42)
This empty pergola in a street-gridded, community-scaled mixed-use development in suburban Cascades, VA has been erected to accommodate future transit use, presumably by shuttle bus or van. (Fig. 43)

Changing retail patterns combine with consumptive land use to render vast parking lots virtually empty. (Fig. 44)

The force of competition and consolidation leaves vacant developments in its wake. (Fig. 45)
Chapter 4: CONCLUSIONS

This chapter draws conclusions which answer the thesis questions: “What are the circumstances in which a public space-anchored, or street-making, approach is successful in suburban commercial development? As a developer, how would one employ this prototype to capitalize on the applicable market and design circumstances? And, what is the prospect for a public space/street-anchored type of commercial development?” The answers are grouped by the four factors discussed above: social, economic, functional, and financial.

What are the circumstances in which a public space-anchored, or street-making, approach is successful in suburban commercial development?

Socially, the community must care about having a locale for public space interaction, in the old-fashioned urban way. There is a big market in America for developments such as
Super Wal-Mart -- the 200,000 sq. ft. megastore whose slogan is “Lettuce, Lug Nuts and Lingerie.” The public space-anchored development can only work if it meets the community’s social demands, broadly defined. More specifically, the public demand can be estimated by proxy. Where there is an active municipality the MS/TC is more likely to comprehend and leverage social and political demand. This vetting process may occur via a public review process: for example, where a site has suffered controversy over the type of development to approve, but it is inevitable that some kind of development will proceed. The MS/TC is the product of a laborious design process and as such a site undergoing scrutiny and debate from multiple stakeholders may generate an MS/TC type concept. The participation of the municipality is important in framing the project, even if the public does not have a direct financial stake. It is questionable whether the planning/design process would work as well in an unincorporated district. A local society which is feeling the palpable pressure of change because of rapid growth or significant commercial failure may also be a candidate for success in implementing the MS/TC, because of the model’s restorative urban qualities.

Though many of the current examples of the MS/TC model have been introduced to affluent communities the prototype in not clearly income-specific. Lower- and middle- income suburbs may serve as viable sites for the development strategy in part because communities of those income levels tend to have higher densities, and may therefore be more naturally amenable to development in the MS/TC manner.

Economically, a prosperous market attracted to a development with a desirable public space will be more likely to lease space quickly, thereby reducing the risk of investing in the plaza and streetscape. In a weak market the municipality would have to take the lead; an intelligent developer would avoid shouldering such a risk. A strong market for a non-retail component, such as office or high-density residential, can provide the initiative for a mixed-use development, since the MS/TC has proven that synergy works. Scale is a big issue, though: community-targeted businesses stick to their community catchment area while regional-targeted commercial and residential uses can pick and choose a locale. A small MS/TC such as Downtown Park Forest has to work within its confined local economy.

Functionally, there are a variety of site circumstances in which MS/TC development can be successful. As the cases studies show, there is no singular size of community in which a street-and-space design can be positioned. The projects do not locate immediately adjacent to an interstate; perhaps that juxtaposition would be too intrusive and ruin the effort at creating human-scaled space. What is more important is coherent circulation, access and visibility for cars and people within the site. The site needs enough depth to accommodate at least two
facing edifices plus a street in between and parking behind, either surface or decked: this limits
the ability to retrofit surface parking areas of dead strip centers along arterial roads. The examples
show that MS/TC developments do not have to be located along transit lines. Management
must be coordinated either by central ownership or contractual agreement, to help avoid the
pitfalls of fragmented decisionmaking.

Financially, if there is a deep pocket up front the development can introduce a mix of several
components at once, as well as carve out the infrastructure. This funding could come from
public financing or from an institutional investor. But there must be a large first phase to
establish the synergy and secure possible rent premiums.

*As a developer, how would one employ this prototype to capitalize on the applicable
market and design circumstances?*

Demographic changes, especially the tsunami of aging boomers, will make dense, mixed-use
suburban developments increasingly attractive for residential purposes. Presumably in the
MS/TC a resident can enjoy convenient access to shops and services, plus camaraderie in cafes
and plazas, without having to endure the cost/noise/crime of moving back into central city
areas -- if indeed these residents ever were home anywhere but in a suburb.

To make the most of this flexible development prototype, the MS/TC can skew its component
mix, playing to the market strengths. The cases show that Redmond really hit its home run
with office, while Mizner Park undergirded its program mix with luxury residential. Conversely
Park Forest downplayed its weakness in the retail. There is substantial latitude for adjusting
the proportion of components, however some of the components must be walk-in activities
like stores or entertainment. If a development were only office and residential -- i.e. mixed-use,
but private -- the calculus for providing amenities would be different, and using a street pattern
would be inappropriate. Using a formula would be ill-advised, unlike other suburban
commercial prototypes in which decisionmaking can be made practically on autopilot. Where
land value is weak, as in Park Forest, it is unclear how well a redevelopment will work, though
creating a public space network seems to create value and to differentiate the place.

Functionally, there is a well-established set of design principles to make both cars and people
happy, including traffic calming devices, sidewalks with street furniture, and so on. This palette
can meet the needs of all types of tenant, however adequate parking is crucial. The phasing
should be timed such that several uses debut at once, alongside the central park or plaza.
Financially, a private developer would be justified in seeking public funding, given the MS/TC’s creation of a public good in the space. But there are also plenty of examples where developments have gone ahead with purely private financing, especially in large master-planned communities such as Reston Town Center, VA and Town Center Drive in Valencia, CA.

What is the prospect for a public space/street-anchored type of commercial development?

Here, social, economic and functional considerations interweave. Demand spurring the MS/TC trend may wane, in which case certain MS/TC developments could decline in favor of something new down the pike. However, it seems that some of the social issues, such as the strange effect on humans of dealing with so much technology, and the advent of three-hour rush hours, are probably not going to disappear overnight. If these projects avoid being too patently artificial, and are composed of well-constructed and designed buildings which are not dependent upon novelty for value, the MS/TC developments will not have bet too much money on the social force.

The existing MS/TC projects seem to have evolve mostly out of efforts to solve a problem with retail at a site. They may be vulnerable if retail as an space-utilizing industry drops further, though a leasing strategy to find a niche will bolster this component. There is room for re-examining the choices of floorplates and building systems (especially in buildings which themselves are mixed-use, such as those with apartments over retail) in order to facilitate adaptive reuse and satisfy unknown future needs.

The diversification of an MS/TC portfolio may insulate it from financial weakness of a given component, assuming the project has a single owner. However due to the public interaction quality of the model, it seems the synergy element could backfire, if one component begins to tank. Public space maintenance could be a financial drain, especially if costs spiral. As time goes by, developers may innovate a mechanism to capture financing economies of scale in order to fund what is otherwise an intensively-tailored and complex prototype.

Conclusion: Look Out For More

To date MS/TC developments have been within an upper size limit -- they are new and have been created as single projects. But the prospect for a public space/street-anchored type of suburban development is greater than a project-level phenomenon. Rather, the MS/TC model
which this thesis explores is the forerunner of a burgeoning new approach to the whole complex issue of land use, value and society. The new Main Street/Town Center form is geometrically expandable. One can envision street/block/public-space modules being strung together, which when large enough, would begin to revisit quintessential urban form. There will be differences in the suburban incarnation, which remain to be seen.

As a foretaste, below is a site plan for Town Center Drive in Valencia, CA. Valencia itself is a master-planned community begun in the 1960s, encompassing several thousand acres in Santa Clarita County, a few valleys north of downtown Los Angeles and very dry. Valencia’s example of the MS/TC is a true hybrid. The project does not refute the mall but is actually grafted onto one, hinged by a central plaza. In plan this is a fascinating demonstration of the principle of framing “positive” space. Entertainment, hotel, and office components line the two-lane street, (replete with historically-cued diagonal parking spaces) which extends to a residential cap at its opposite end. One can see the beginnings of a two-tiered auto circulation system, where the main street for traffic conveying purposes is slightly off to one side, while the “Main Street” is the spine of dense building and social activity. It will be interesting to see how Valencia plays out. Town Center Drive may prove to be the product of a trend: built now only so the infamously auto-oriented southern Californians can have a few yards to stroll, but too artificial to sustain interest, and destined for financial failure long before structural obsolescence. Or, Valencia may develop a series of such streets as nodes scattered across the valley which provide all the amenities of the present, but in a more enriching pattern.

Town Center Drive in Valencia, CA. The street is under construction in 1998 and a few of the commercial properties are already open. The mall dates from 1991 and is financially successful – the new main street is intended as a complement. The developer is the Newhall Land & Farming Company. (Fig. 47)
Background Material

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