

CDA
PO Box 7753
Long Beach, CA 90807
888-429-1224
Fax 562-997-2844

Visit our Website
www.californiadowntown.com

CDA Goals

Sustain and serve a membership that represents downtowns and business districts.

Provide education, training and networking opportunities.

Expand awareness about and enhance the stature of the CDA.

Inform, promote, and recognize the accomplishments of members.

Advocate and monitor legislation pertaining to downtowns and business districts.

The CDA Newsletter is published quarterly by the Board of Directors and distributed to CDA members and related organizations.

Direct newsletter inquires to:
Carol Thompson, Editor
CDA Newsletter
PO Box 7753
Long Beach, CA 90807

(888) 429-1224
(562) 997-2844 Fax
email:
cdamembership@charter.net

UNDERSTANDING MIXED-USE OBSTACLES TO OPTIMIZE DOWNTOWN SUCCESS

By Al Zelinka, Joseph Smart, and Jennifer Kunz

The current popular interest in mixed use development within downtowns may seem ironic to those familiar with the history of the American City. For nearly a century, policy makers and city planners have worked to separate and compartmentalize those areas of our cities dedicated to living, working, shopping and playing. Separating and buffering such 'incompatible' uses from one another was believed to be the key to a community's health, safety and comfort and the automobile, with an expansive network of roadways, was the only necessary connection between them.

So how did we suddenly rediscover mixed-use neighborhoods, blocks and buildings? The answer may lie in the growth of lifestyles different than those best served by typical suburban developments. Singles, empty-nesters, young couples putting off having children, all have interests beyond multiple bedroom homes, large yards and good schools—the main attractions of suburban areas—and these groups are making up a larger and larger portion of our demographic pie.



Segregating land uses through zoning
Robert Klekner/RBF Consulting's Urban Design Studio

Mixed use also provides an alternative for those Americans, and Californians in particular, who are experiencing a growing distaste for the negative by-products of suburban sprawl, including environmental degradation and the loss of open space, traffic gridlock, automobile dependence and rising gas prices, and a lack of diversity in homogeneously priced neighborhoods.

Mixed use can refer to city districts, downtowns or neighborhoods, smaller city blocks, or even a single building. Examples of common mixed use configurations could be residential apartments located above ground floor retail in a single building, office space located above retail, or a downtown area that includes neighborhood commercial, office buildings, and high density housing. Mixed use, in summary, occurs vertically or horizontally.



Vertical mixed use

Horizontal mixed use

John Shetland/RBF Consulting's Urban Design Studio

Continued on page 6



Broadway Arms - Anaheim

CIM Group's Broadway Arms, designed by MBH Architects and now under construction in downtown Anaheim, California, is one example of a mixed-use project that addressed a multitude of potential physical, policy and market challenges.

The five-story project includes residential over retail and restaurant uses, with one level of below grade parking. Design challenges included the desire to recall the history of Anaheim through the project's architecture, and addressing limited parking space provided by the project. Parking challenges were magnified by the fact that the project was located within one of Anaheim's Parking Overlay Districts, and much of the parking for the project's retail and restaurant uses was allocated in three nearby public parking garages.

Policy challenges included meeting City requirements for trash and utility services for both residential and commercial uses within a single building, which was new for the City.

Market challenges were addressed in part by ensuring project uses were compatible with surrounding uses including civic uses like City Hall, a museum, office buildings, and the Disney Ice entertainment venue.

The City of Anaheim and the CIM Group formed a public/private partnership, where the City will own the underground parking podium, and the developer will retain the residential and retail uses. Public/private partnerships are another way to meet market challenges and ensure the desires of both the City and the developer are met.

Mixed Use - *continued from page 1*

The success of mixed-use projects is dependent upon more than popular interest in a trendy product type. A successful development must find the proper balance between the needs of different uses and users. It must be compatible with and acceptable to the surrounding context. It must attract consumers and tenants, and answer to lenders and investors who may not be familiar with the complexities of mixed-use developments (see Sidebar Case Study: *Broadway Arms*)

To best accommodate mixed use in downtowns, it is important to understand not only benefits but also challenges. Challenges to successful mixed-use projects belong to three categories: physical design challenges, policy challenges, and market challenges. By understanding challenges, downtown interests can optimize the long-term benefits and community support for mixed-use development.

PHYSICAL DESIGN CHALLENGES

A successful mixed-use project must answer to the needs and desires of potentially conflicting users. Residents are likely to value privacy, safety, and quiet. A restaurant owner may value outdoor dining areas, the ability to provide patrons with live entertainment, and adequate dumpster and loading areas. When a mixed-use project proposes apartments above ground floor restaurant and retail uses, how are these conflicting needs balanced through physical design? The following are some of the physical design challenges that must be addressed in order to prevent conflicts among mixed-use project inhabitants.



Mission Meridian Village in South Pasadena is a good example of a new mixed use project (background) that fits into an existing neighborhood. Al Zelinka/RBF Consulting's Urban Design Studio

Parking: Residents of mixed-use projects are concerned about the security of their vehicles as well as having available parking spaces for themselves and their guests. To accomplish this, residential parking spaces should be separated from spaces dedicated to commercial uses, and secured with gates or provided with separate entries. Among the various commercial uses within a mixed use project, shared parking scenarios may be appropriate, reducing the number of parking spaces a developer must provide. Shared parking scenarios take into account the different peak parking needs of different uses at different times of the day.

Noise: The expectations of residents for a quiet home must be balanced with the realities of commercial uses. Structural design should incorporate appropriate materials to buffer sounds between residential and non-residential uses. In instances where physical design cannot fully address noise problems the regulation of commercial operational hours can be used, and residents can be asked to sign a waiver or disclosure document before moving in.

Loading Areas: Commercial users require adequate loading and docking areas, which residents may associate with noise, dirt and unpleasant aesthetics. Loading areas in mixed-use projects must be appropriately screened from residential uses by incorporation of well-designed walls or landscaping.

Connectivity: One of the most touted benefits of mixed-use developments is their ability to increase pedestrian, bicycle and transit connectivity. But locating residential, commercial and office uses together is not enough to ensure that the project is accessible to alternative transportation users. Attention must be paid to

pedestrian and bicycle connections within the project, and between the project and surrounding uses.

Refuse: Commercial uses, especially restaurant uses, generate a substantially greater amount of waste than residential uses. The project must provide all users with adequate refuse facilities as well as buffer residential from the negative views and odors of commercial dumpster areas.

Transition Areas and

Screening: Landscaping, screening and building setbacks should all be used to separate uses when possible.

Density: Mixed-use projects are often associated with high-density development, however the density and intensity of a project should be contingent on the surrounding neighborhood and character to appease the existing community and provide continuity within a neighborhood.



*Santa Row is a new mixed-use development in San Jose
Jason Jones/RBF Consulting's Urban Design Studio*

POLICY CHALLENGES

Policy obstacle can hinder the development of even the most well designed mixed-use projects. Cities interested in attracting mixed-use projects should assess their existing policy documents to determine whether they encourage or discourage mixed use developments. The following illustrates some of these potential policy problems:

General Plan: Existing General Plan policies can discourage mixed use by mandating single uses within land use designations. To encourage mixed use, General Plans should be amended to clarify that single use districts may allow multiple uses in certain, defined circumstances without creating General Plan inconsistencies. General Plans should also establish a policy context that highlights the benefits of mixed use in terms of trip reduction and economic reinvestment.

Zoning Ordinance: Zoning ordinances may outright prohibit mixed-use projects. Zoning ordinances should be amended to allow high-density residential units in commercial and office zones, or allow for a flexible Planned Development process.

Design Review: Design review for mixed-use projects can be overly burdensome, especially in cities that do not have an established policy context for mixed-use projects. Cities interested in encouraging mixed use should allow projects that meet certain defined code criteria to be administratively reviewed, or provide accelerated processing incentives or reduced fees for mixed use projects.

MARKET CHALLENGES

Mixed-use projects that are well designed and can successfully navigate policy obstacles may still face market challenges, both real and perceived. Challenges include choosing the correct mix of uses and not constructing more than an existing market can absorb. Perceived challenges may include

an investor's skepticism of the marketability of mixed-use projects.

Providing the Proper Balance of Uses: Developers of mixed-use projects must pay attention to the mass of commercial and residential space, and provide uses that are mutually supporting. Examples of mutually supporting uses are high-density apartments and a grocery store, or other basic goods and services.

Market Demand:

Mixed-use developments must be based on accurate data to determine what uses can be supported by the existing market. Just because a project is mixed use and incorporates residential uses, doesn't mean that the new residential uses alone can support the retail component of the project.

Wariness of Investors: Investors are not planners or architects, and may be wary of a product type they are unfamiliar with, or consider only a passing trend. Cities as well as developers interested in new mixed-use projects must combine educational and promotional efforts to build investor confidence. In many cases, investors otherwise wary of mixed use may grow more supportive if the project is phased incrementally. Residential uses can be constructed first to assure the investor that the later constructed commercial phases will have enough density to be supported.

CONCLUSION

As California's population growth continues and redevelopment and infill development projects occur to accommodate the growth, downtowns throughout the State will increasingly embrace mixed-use development patterns. While the merits of mixed use are routinely espoused, the obstacles generally receive little attention. Familiarization with common obstacles can minimize the potentially negative dimensions of mixed-use development and maximize success. Mixed-use development in California's downtowns holds the potential to significantly contribute to a better quality of life for an ever-diversifying population.

About the authors

Al Zelinka, AICP, csm, is a Principal of RBF Consulting's Urban Design Studio. He is the co-author of SafeScape (published in 2001 by the American Planning Association's Planners Press), co-author of Placemaking on a Budget (expected Summer/Fall 2005), and is a Certified Main Street Manager. Contact him at azelinka@rbf.com. Joseph Smart is an Architect and Managing Principal of MBH Architect's Newport Beach office. MBH has designed a number of mixed use and downtown urban infill developments throughout California. Contact him at josephs@mbgarch.com. Jennifer Kunz is a policy planner at RBF Consulting. She recently earned her graduate degree in urban and regional planning at the University of California, Irvine, where she focused her research on economic development strategies in Southern California historic neighborhoods. She can be reached at jkunz@rbf.com.