

Theme 2: Land Use Mix and Development Intensity

Land use mix and development intensities greatly influence a community's abilities to provide home choices and greater home affordability, reduce traffic congestion, make more efficient use of infrastructure, and create more livable communities. Built examples from across the United States demonstrate the potential for creating "great places" in a community that balance land use mix and development intensities with aggressive positions for high-quality urban design and place-making strategies. Coordinated recommendations for these topics generally improve an area's economic vitality, perceived security, and sense-of-place or character. Additional standards enacted by a community for land use mix and development intensities ensure places are compatible with adjacent properties and contribute positively to the character of surrounding streets and neighborhoods.

Considerations for a comprehensive plan focus on more generalized recommendations for land use mix and development intensities, including a preferred proportion of land uses, the physical relationship between uses, and the compatibility of land uses to each other. Stated preferences for maximizing opportunities in Garner are presented in Chapter 2 of the document, including the General Framework Map, Character Typology Map, and Development Change and Intensity Map. Additional considerations to influence preferred land use mix and development intensity topics are largely addressed in the town's Unified Development Ordinance, including setbacks, parking standards, open space requirements, privacy and compatibility between land uses, and buffers.

One type of project gaining in popularity in the United States is mixed-use development. By creating places where people can live, play, work, and shop all in one general area, these projects are able to combine various public amenities with compatible land uses in a centralized location. Successful mixed-use developments noted around the country generally include residential uses and one or more of the following: commercial, office,

light industrial, civic, hotel, public parks or plazas, and dedicated open space.

While mixed-use developments come in a variety of forms, they typically are categorized as either vertical mixed-use buildings or horizontal mixed-use sites (or blocks). As described in Planning and Urban Design Standards published for the American Planning Association (APA), "Vertical mixed-use buildings combine different uses in the same building. The lower floors generally have more public uses, with private uses on the upper levels. Examples include residential space over commercial establishments, street-level retail with floors of office above, residential and hotel uses in the same building, and retail wrapped around a parking structure with multiple uses above. Vertical mixed-use development may have any number of revenue-producing and mutually-supportive uses in the same building."

The APA's Planning and Urban Design Standards also describes how "Horizontal mixed-use development combines single-use buildings on distinct parcels (or blocks) in one planned development project (or blocks identified for a specific place, like downtown) with a range of uses. Examples include residential neighborhoods surrounding commercial or office development adjacent to a major highway, or a medical campus with surrounding professional offices. This approach avoids the financing and code

complexities of vertical mixed-use buildings while achieving the goals of place-making made possible by conveniently bringing together complementary land uses in one place." Both vertical and horizontal mixed-use developments contribute positively to the creation of places that enliven activity centers while meeting the everyday needs of the community.

Generally speaking, town officials prefer vertical mixed-use buildings for the discernable center (or core) of a development. One or more blocks radiating out from the discernable center may include horizontal mixed-use development; with different single- or multi-use building types

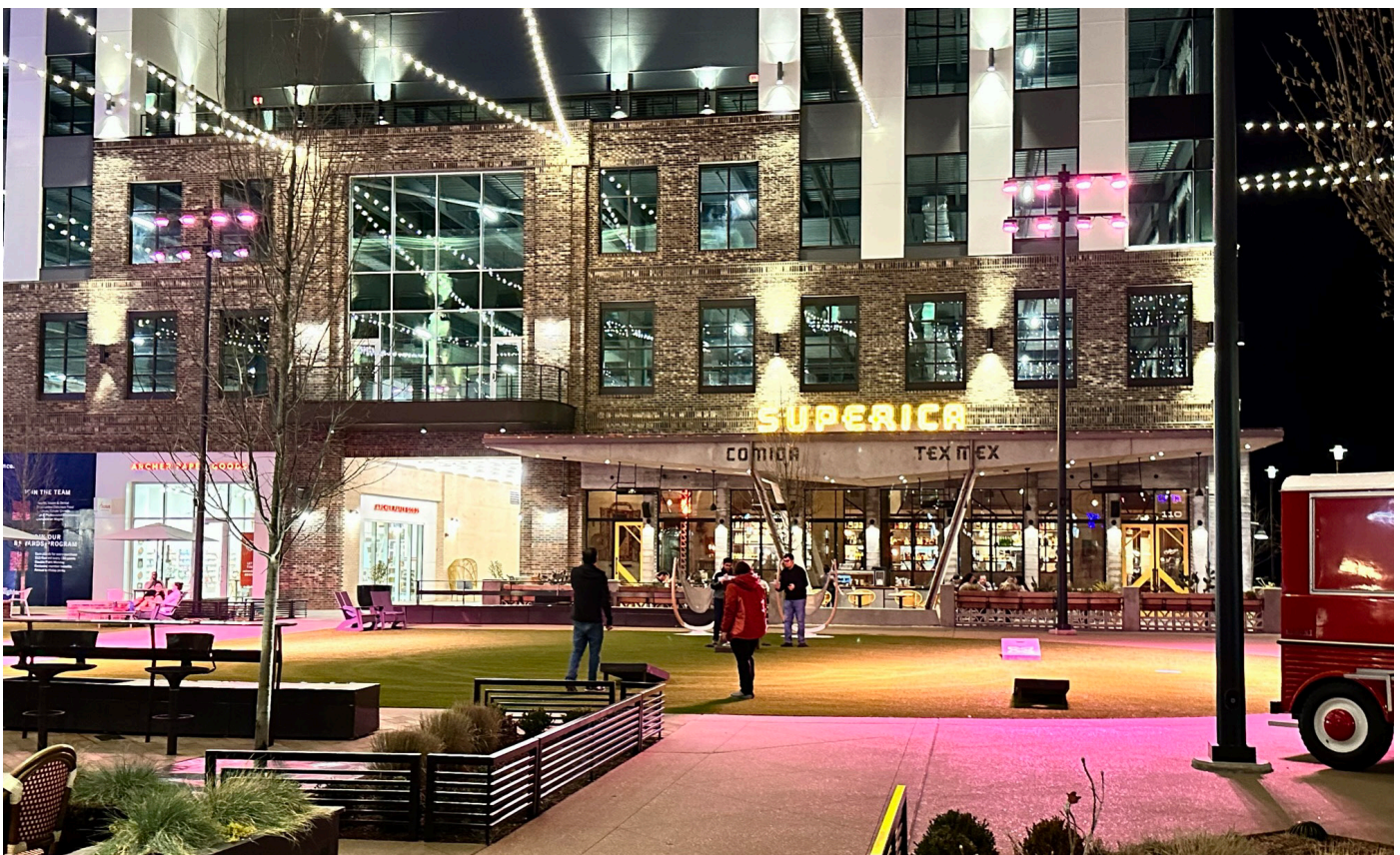
“As cities grow, suburban nodes will become denser and start to take on certain characteristics that we identify as urban. They will have more mixed-use development, taller buildings, formal public spaces, and have more people commute into them. These are gradual processes, but will change the perception that you have about a more-reliant suburban community versus a self-sustaining city.”

- Laura Vaughan, Editor of Suburban Urbanities

Coordinate changes in the town with a single purpose to make it a more complete and self-sustaining community.

Evaluate future opportunities presented to the town in the context of an overarching goal to create a self-sustaining community in the future. This means, in part, an emphasis on bringing new employment, retail, and services to town residents, and providing greater home choices in the community to support different backgrounds: the creative class, working class, retirees, and children.

intermixed in the same block. Larger mixed-use developments may also include single use blocks further away from the discernable center and the horizontal mixed-use transition areas. Single use blocks should include a variety of building sizes and formats to avoid design monotony, and help transition effectively to existing land uses and development intensities observed on adjacent properties.



Concentrate future development in Mixed-Use Activity Centers.

The General Framework Map in Chapter 2 identifies multiple locations for development activity centers. They should be places where people can live, work, shop, play, and be entertained. Several activity centers located in close proximity to one another should be connected via bus circulator, bicycle lanes, sidewalks, or greenways to minimize the number of vehicle trips in the community.



Support transformation of newly-identified mixed-use activity center sites.

Support through town policies and ordinance the redevelopment of existing suburban-scale, automobile-oriented shopping centers into mixed use activity centers sometime in the future, which would provide new opportunities to work, live, shop, play, and entertain in Garner. Promote specific locations along US 401, US 70, and NC 50 as new mixed-use activity centers when their existing buildings and uses become obsolete. Coordinate with officials at the North Carolina Department of Transportation, Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, and Wake County to target future premium transit service (bus rapid transit) in these corridors with major stops serving the activity centers.



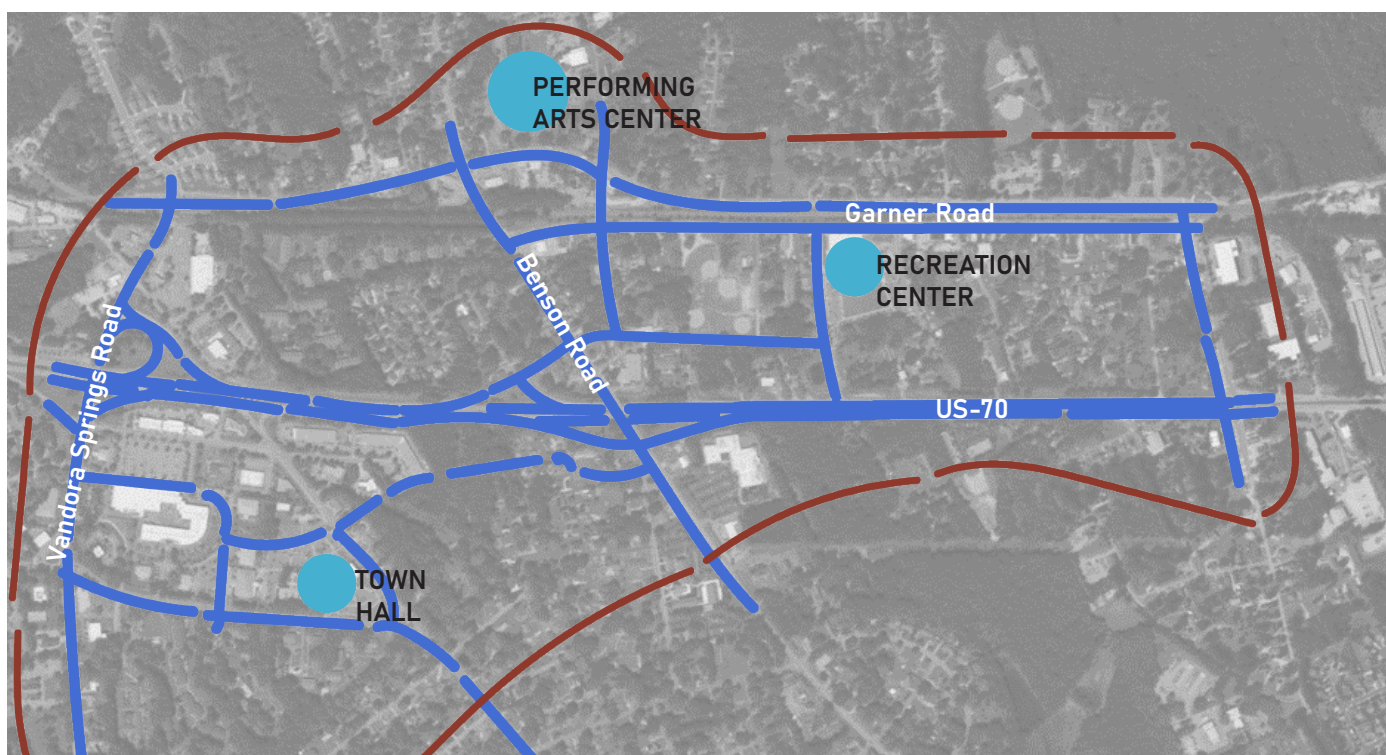
Consider the possibility for an expanded civic center in the town that extends on both sides of US 70.

Downtown Garner supports many elements of a traditional downtown in North Carolina. However, some features — like town hall, the library, and police department — are located in a nearby activity center centered near Fifth Avenue and Aversboro Road. This is not a dire situation, but building synergy between the two locations will improve opportunities for both in the future. The shared goal for both locations should be to anchor community activities and civic life in a predictable manner.

A broader focus area boundary encompassing the area marked in red on the figure below contemplates a more complementary relationship between the two discrete centers today. A strategy to elevate the stature and prominence of civic buildings in the larger focus area — town hall, the recreation center, performing arts center, library, and police station — should consider one or more design elements that brand the destinations as unique elements of the Garner community.

Connections between the destinations should evaluate opportunities to stitch back the two areas divided by US 70, including vehicle, bus circulator, bicycle, and pedestrian connections. Open space throughout the focus area would provide order in the landscape and provide numerous opportunities for informal community gathering and programmed civic events.

The neighborhoods between civic buildings, open spaces, and commercial destinations throughout the focus area provide the opportunity to increase the number of residents living in or near the area. This would increase the vibrancy of the area, and provide built-in customers to keep local businesses going strong. The integration of new housing through infill development or redevelopment of existing sites should be done in a manner that establishes a stronger relationship to the surrounding community character and context. Consideration should be given to building orientation to streets, public spaces, and surrounding non-residential development.

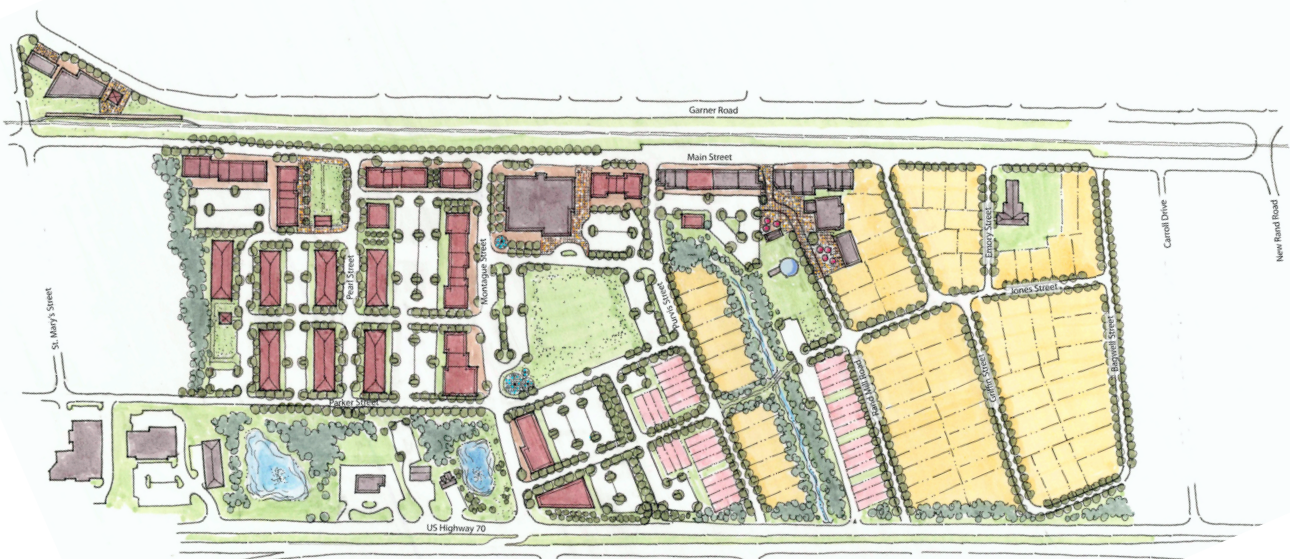


Continue implementing recommendations for downtown from previous town plans and studies.

The previous Garner Forward Comprehensive Plan included a concept for infill development and design enhancements in the historic center of Garner. The vision suggested in this work reinforced Garner Road and the immediate area as a more traditional, small-town downtown area with activity on both sides of the railroad. Neighborhoods surrounding the historic

downtown provide stability for the area. The previous comprehensive plan also noted the need for recreation uses in, and leading into, the historic downtown.

The changes that have occurred in downtown since the previous comprehensive plan was adopted have helped reinforce its place as an important destination in the community. Continuing these efforts will create more benefits for the immediate area and all Garner residents that associated with the downtown.



Support redevelopment efforts on the north side of Garner Road in downtown to create a complete 'main street' environment.

The overall width of the main street corridor in downtown, which includes the rail line and Garner Road, in combination with one-story architecture creates a dimension that makes the two sides seem almost completely disconnected from one another. However, many railroad

towns with thriving downtowns are organized around a railroad and street corridor with similar dimensions.

Physically and psychologically connecting the two sides of downtown across the railroad tracks could be achieved with more buildings facing the corridor and building heights of at least two stories. Over time, town officials should also encourage the redevelopment of parcels that adjoin the corridor to create a more vibrant main street experience.



Identify and protect areas in town for future non-residential development, particularly those uses that generate jobs and bolster the tax base.

Competition for land in a fast-growing area can sometimes result in parcels that are ideally situated for commercial, office, or industrial uses converting to residential development. The short-term gain realized on these parcels precludes opportunities in the future for job creation and higher levels of tax revenue generation. Delineating key parcels in the community and protecting them for highest and best uses in the future ensures the town has long-term opportunities to be a regional jobs center in the Triangle region.

To this end, town officials should resist reclassifying activity centers, character areas, or development intensities on the maps in Chapter 2 to residential uses unless it is part of a mixed-use development proposal. And, even in this situation, the residential component of a proposed mixed-use development should be subservient to the non-residential components of the same development.

Town officials should also proactively align the zoning with the Character Typology Map in Chapter 2 to protect important areas for future employment opportunities.

Support opportunities to retain or expand businesses with more flexible uses or site design considerations.

Development patterns in Garner support more intense non-residential land uses in some areas. In order to retain existing businesses and attract new ones, it may be necessary to allow more flexibility in land use and parking requirements. Such flexibility can help current owners maintain their presence and improve the overall experience for their workers.



Encourage infill development and redevelopment in existing-developed areas.

Intensification of existing developed areas using infill development and redevelopment principles can help ensure the community thrives, and resources are managed well. Town officials should advocate for and, if possible, incentivize infill development and redevelopment projects inside town limits as a way to reinvest in areas with existing infrastructure capacity. Doing so will shorten vehicle trip lengths (both in distance and time), minimize expensive infrastructure expansion investments, and avoid the loss of rural areas for future development beyond municipal limits. It will also simultaneously increase land values, sale values, and potential tax revenues (without an increase in tax rates) inside town limits.

Think about new or expanded community facilities needed to serve future residents when reviewing development applications.

Additional roads, parks, schools, fire stations, or other community facilities and services will be needed in the future to meet new residents' needs. Town officials should consider future year needs when reviewing development applications. Sometimes new development or redevelopment affords the opportunity to request land or building space dedication for new parks, schools, or something else needed to meet future year demands. Or, (re)development of a property affords the opportunity to make new street connections that lowers congestion on nearby roads.

If appropriate, the town should ask development applicants to consider some of these needs in their site concept plans. In some cases, the town, or their service provider partners, may need or want to compensate the developer or landowner for upsized infrastructure or dedication of land or building space for a public purpose.



Infill development that utilizes the parking areas in front of existing buildings helps make a stronger connection to the street, improves visibility of the development, enhances the streetscape and maximizes utilization of the site.

Build a community attractive to today's businesses and their employees.

In today's idea-based economy, where creativity and innovation are often valued more than experience and seniority, a new type of business environment has taken shape. The internet and other technologies have minimized old ways of doing business based on the physical office, time spent at your desk, and a long commute. The new resource is creative people and finding ways to attract them with incentives such as flexible schedules and telecommuting.

The office park of the 80's and 90's has been replaced with mixed-use corporate campuses

and urban lofts and warehouses. Previously, municipalities competed to attract business with the tax breaks or Class A office space. Today, many companies will only locate in a community that is walkable, mixed-use, and diverse. This is because the best employees will no longer settle for a suburban lifestyle and are seeking employment in vibrant communities with active street life and culture.

To take advantage of this shift in culture and mindset, the town should promote the creation of high-quality built environments through smarter land use regulations and development incentives, and then tailor a marketing message to feature this aspect of Garner.



Spotlight on: Suburban Retrofit

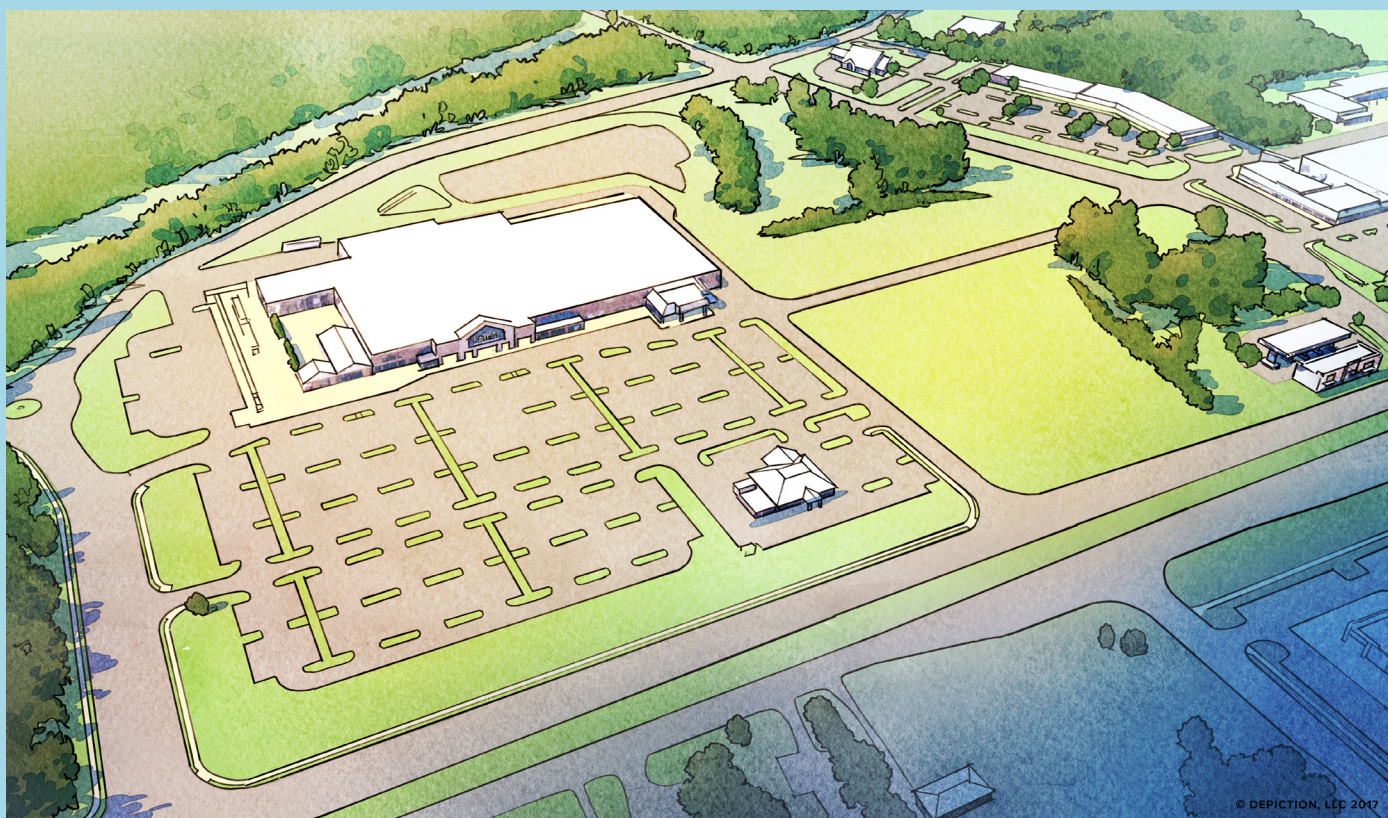
Suburban Retrofit is the process of converting areas that are already developed in conventional suburban patterns into mixed-use, multi-modal, activated corridors or centers. This approach reflects a change in preference from suburban, auto-oriented development to a more traditional mixed-use form, where people can and will want to walk between new residences and a range of small and large retail shops, businesses, offices, and recreational opportunities. Context-sensitive Suburban Retrofit addresses typical conflicts between commercial and residential uses by carefully transitioning from small- to large-scale building types.

Suburban retrofit occurs in areas that are mostly developed, but may have underutilized parcels or excessive surface parking. Retrofitting existing building sites allows developers to take advantage

of existing infrastructure and services, and helps to mitigate the effects of sprawl by improving transportation connections.

Suburban retrofit also helps address barriers to bicycle and pedestrian connectivity in places like aging shopping centers by enhancing pedestrian connections and recreating internal driveways and internal streets with infill buildings fronting onto them. This redevelopment approach relocates parking to the rear of buildings, rather than having large surface parking lots between the building and the street.

The illustrations show a conceptual and incremental approach to suburban retrofit of a suburban, big-box shopping center with a large parking lot between the street and the building.



A typical layout for a suburban, big box shopping center located several hundred feet back from the public street with a large surface parking lot in between. One or more outparcels in the shopping center support restaurants with drive-throughs, banks or other uses. The outparcel buildings appear to almost float in the sea of asphalt allocated for surface parking.



Early infill development on vacant property next to the existing big box shopping center is sensitive to the overall vision and plan for the new activity center. Buildings are oriented toward the access driveway that will become a new main street in future phases of the project. Parking is located behind buildings to reinforce a walkable and activated streetscape planned for the new main street.



Infill development on vacant property next to the big box shopping center continues. In this case, new townhouses are added to the activity center. A new park is also built behind the big box store that is phased in construction to allow for continued operations at the declining business. The park is also connected with the adjacent greenway. Redevelopment on some portions of the existing surface parking lot swap under utilized parking areas for new buildings and civic spaces.



Redevelopment on the remaining portions of the existing surface parking continue as the big box store is now closed. A new block pattern for the activity center is complete by converting additional drive aisles to walkable streets.



The closed big box store is demolished to make room for additional mixed-use development, which brings new residential uses (in this case townhouses) into the activity center. Access to the new park built in an earlier phase is also increased via the new grid street network. The former suburban shopping center is now a mixed-use activity center.