

# REDEVELOPMENT OF GREYFIELDS

## I. Introduction

In his book, *A Man In Full*, Tom Wolfe comments on the infamous American commercial strip when he writes, “The only way you could tell you were leaving one community and entering another was when the franchises started repeating.”

The glut of big-box super stores and endless strip malls that line our commercial corridors from coast to coast are falling into decay as populations continue their movement away from city centers. The result is a repetitive cycle of new greenfield construction and economic decline in previously developed areas. This pattern of development results in land consumption that outpaces population growth (1 percent population growth in a metropolitan area generally means at least 7 percent increase in land usage as a direct result of conventional development<sup>i</sup>), and thus has led to the unprecedented sprawling of America.



In the wake of this wasteful development pattern, a new trend is emerging that seeks to advance community-building principles, environmental sustainability, adaptive-reuse and multiple transit options. “Greyfield redevelopment” is the catchphrase used to describe a more progressive approach to abandoned, commercial properties. Its aim is to convert them into mixed-use, mixed-income, pedestrian-oriented communities instead of forsaking them for new projects further down the road.

### **A. What is Greyfield Redevelopment?**

The term “greyfield” was coined in a recent study jointly published by the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU) and PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) to refer to the sites of derelict shopping centers, or so-called “dead malls,” often characterized by the vast empty asphalt parking lots that surround them. The term parallels “brownfield,” the development industry term for contaminated urban sites and “greenfield,” the term used to describe undeveloped land. In contrast, greyfields are developed sites that are economically and physically ripe for major redevelopment. Typically, greyfields do not have the environmental problems found in brownfields. More likely is that they have fallen victim to changing demographics, new retail formats, overbuilt retail, or loss of anchor stores. The CNU study suggests that once mall sales drop to \$150 per square foot or less, a site qualifies as a greyfield.<sup>ii</sup> Their analysis further reveals several other key real estate and demographic characteristics of greyfield malls:

- The majority of greyfield mall sites are privately owned.
- Greyfield malls have significantly lower occupancies than non-greyfield malls.

- The average greyfield mall gross leaseable area (GLA) is under 500,000 square feet (sf), significantly smaller than non-greyfield malls.
- Greyfield malls are, on average, 8 to 10 years older than non-greyfield malls.
- Greyfield malls compete with an average of 22 other retail centers, i.e., neighborhood and community centers, other regional malls, within five miles (2.33 million square feet of competing space).
- Greyfield malls are more often located in moderate and low-income neighborhoods with older, affordable housing.

PWC conservatively estimates that as many as 140 regional malls in the United States are already greyfields, with another 200 to 250 such malls approaching greyfield status. Together these two categories represent 18 percent of all regional malls nationally.

While the study by the CNU and PWC focuses on regional malls, due to their particularly severe impact when in decline, there are other types of retail properties that pose similar redevelopment challenges. Even the ubiquitous small-scale strip malls and big box outlets found along commercial corridors in suburbs throughout the country contribute to conditions far more severe than mere visual blight when in decline. They lead to lost tax base, lost job opportunities, and valuable land sitting unused, or underutilized at a minimum. *Thus, greyfield redevelopment refers to the process of reclaiming existing sites that are economically nonviable (including, but not limited to, failing shopping malls and strip centers, and big box outlets) and transforming them into new uses that can revitalize a community's local economy.*

## **B. What is the Role of Greyfield Redevelopment in Achieving Smart Growth?**

In their latest book entitled, *The Regional City: Planning for the End of Sprawl*, Peter Calthorpe and William Fulton suggest that some of the best infill development opportunities to combat sprawl are represented by redeveloping greyfields into “urban places” that are walkable, human-scale, meaningful, and memorable. In recent years, infill development projects and “Smart Growth” programs have taken center stage as strategies to curb massive urban sprawl. At the same time, greyfields have emerged as readily available community assets offering the chance to revise land uses, reposition retail stores and services, and reconfigure all or part of a shopping center from retail to mixed-use. CNU member Victor Dover of Dover, Kohl & Partners in Florida has worked on mall revitalization throughout the Southeast, including the large, ongoing revitalization of Eastgate Mall in Chattanooga, Tennessee (see Appendix A: Case Studies). He states, “The death of a mall in your community does not have to be bad news. With the correct approach, redevelopment can be the recipe for an economic rebound... Stop thinking about these as failed shopping center properties and start thinking about them as potential mixed-use properties.”<sup>iii</sup>

In light of the current wave of popular and professional conversation surrounding concepts such as infill development, smart growth, first tier suburbs, transit oriented development, and sprawl, greyfield redevelopment is perhaps the biggest planning issue facing America today. Greyfield sites offer the opportunity to build sustainable developments or even new neighborhoods within existing communities. They are the first wave of large landholdings located in established areas, often near transit, with existing utilities and transportation systems, and the potential for significant densification.

Greyfield redevelopment can contribute to many goals of Smart Growth, including:

- Reallocating land use, existing infrastructure, and non-productive suburban locations into higher density residential and mixed commercial use providing an increased property tax base to local governments;
- Increasing access of people to jobs, and jobs to labor force;
- Making better use of existing infrastructure and lowering costs of public services such as: transit, sidewalks, water and sewer, schools, and public safety (police, fire, ambulance);
- Reducing time, money, energy, and air pollution associated with commuting and other uses of single occupancy vehicles;
- Strengthening the real estate markets and property values and renewing existing neighborhoods and housing stock; and
- Adding to economic diversity and therefore, sustainability.

In short, redevelopment of greyfield sites maximizes commercial uses and increases the number of households in trade areas. In economic development terms, the result is a reduction of supply (redevelopment of greyfield sites), and a corresponding increase in demand (through the addition of new households). Further greyfield development helps to keep consumer spending and associated tax revenue within the community. In turn, this stimulates additional consumer demand and commercial development, or, what is called the multiplier effect.

Just as greyfield redevelopment is consistent with Smart Growth practices, it is also consistent with the principles of New Urbanism. According to the CNU, greyfields are among America's best opportunities for developing transit-oriented infill neighborhoods. The benefit of these types of neighborhoods in contrast to typical suburban development patterns is that they are flexible enough to provide for many community needs, including mixed-income housing, jobs, retail, and public space, and other activities essential to a high quality of life. There are several key characteristics of greyfield sites that make them ideally suited for this type of community revitalization:

- Big enough sites. Most available development sites in existing cities and towns are too small to justify the increased costs and risks of infill development. They are also too small to accommodate development projects of sufficient scale to offer real community benefits. Larger properties such as greyfield mall sites, strip centers, or big box sites spread site development costs and enable projects that embrace the full range of new urbanist principles.
- Transit accessibility. Civic leaders and neighbors are interested in the development of transit-oriented communities that include housing, stores, jobs, and schools. Many greyfields are on transit lines, and some even have existing bus hubs on site. More fundamentally, the development of new activity centers on greyfield sites concentrates passenger origins and destinations at density levels high enough to support transit service.
- Mixed-income housing. Housing affordability is a major problem in many metropolitan areas. However, developing higher density mixed-income housing in existing neighborhoods can be difficult, as neighbors often resist multi-family projects and sites are usually too small for significant construction. Greyfield sites are large enough to accommodate a neighborhood built from the ground up

- providing an opportunity to develop quality mixed-income housing that contributes to the economic diversity of a community.
- Civic space. Usable, attractive public space is missing from many suburbs. New urbanist development provides public space for those important times when people are neither at home nor at work. These spaces help give a community its identity and new urbanism its reputation as “the architecture of community.”

## **II. What are the alternatives to Greyfield Redevelopment?**

Greenfield Development – Given that greyfield redevelopment is really just a specific type of infill development targeted at underutilized commercial land uses, one of the alternatives to greyfield development is “greenfield development” – the continued subdivision and conversion of raw land (fields, forests, and other undeveloped land) into urban or suburban land uses. While greyfield redevelopment takes advantage of existing infrastructure to reduce to overall development costs, greenfield development is accompanied by additional costs due to land disturbance for parking lots, streets, power lines, sewer lines, and other public facilities. Similarly, while greyfield redevelopment often leads to the creation of sustainable, transit-oriented neighborhoods within existing communities, greenfield development exacerbates the sprawling car-dependent development pattern that plagues many American cities and suburbs.



Another alternative is to do nothing and let these sites deteriorate with revolving tenants, ultimately remaining vacant. This is the unfortunate condition that plagues many of America’s older commercial corridors. Once vibrant, thriving “main streets” lined with successful businesses, these areas experience a 15-20 year life cycle that ultimately leaves the shopping centers and commercial buildings either vacant or occupied by low-rent tenants struggling to survive. Not only does this create a visually blighted condition that negatively impacts the perception of the surrounding community, but also it erodes the local tax base and leaves local governments desperate to generate revenue even if it means approving less than ideal forms of new development.

## **III. Things to Consider Before Implementing Greyfield Redevelopment**

### **A. What You Need to Do First**

Identify Potential Greyfield Sites Ripe for Redevelopment – The first step in a greyfield redevelopment process is to identify potential sites within the area of study. If the area is a commercial corridor, there are likely to be several sites along the length of the corridor that may be ripe for redevelopment. Once potential sites have been identified, then the planning team can prepare an urban design analysis for each in order to examine in detail the feasibility of converting the existing site into a viable mixed-use or transit-oriented development project (refer to Section IV, Implementation Guidelines). In addition to urban design issues, each site will need to be evaluated in terms of marketability and environmental impact.

Involve Stakeholders, Seek Common Ground – Identify key stakeholders in your community: property owners, businesses, developers, realtors, neighborhood groups, institutional interests, governmental interests, etc. Schedule a public kick-off meeting to educate stakeholders about the benefits of greyfield redevelopment and the challenges inherent revitalizing the market. At the same time, invite the public to raise their concerns, and take note of their issues before proceeding.



Every community will have its own set of unique anxieties about greyfield redevelopment, but there are some common themes to address:

- Concern about increased densification;
- Concern about multi-family residential development; and
- Temptation to artificially inflate the real estate market based on speculation.

Ignite the Public & Private Leadership – From the outset, it is crucial to engage civic leaders in the process to ensure “buy in” and help nurture public/private partnership for implementation. These leaders should be objective and well respected in the community. They should be intensely interested in the future of the region (and in land use issues in general), and should have a desire to work toward a commonly shared set of goals. An economic development plan is a valuable tool to help foster communication between all parties, including civic leaders and area residents.

Define Target Area – This refers to narrowing the focus among identified redevelopment sites to zero in on a specified target area. This is particularly important along strip commercial corridors where there are likely to be numerous options for redevelopment. Typically, it will not be feasible to spread the opportunities out along a substantial length of the corridor. Instead, it is advisable to select a single target area, which may include more than one site that is located on one side of the corridor rather than spread across a major thoroughfare. The exception to this would be in the case of selecting a major intersection, which might serve ultimately as a gateway to the redeveloped area. [For more information on specific strategies to improve entire corridors, please reference the “Retrofitting Corridors Toolkit”].

Create a Multi-Disciplinary Team – As mentioned previously, there are numerous factors that make a particular greyfield site especially viable for future redevelopment. In order to evaluate these factors, it is important to assemble a multi-disciplinary planning team with depth of experience in several key areas, such as: urban design, land use, civil engineering, market research/analysis, housing development, and transportation planning. Each of these disciplines has a role to play in identifying potential sites, honing in on a target area, working with the stakeholders, and crafting a realistic implementation strategy that taps into both public and private resources.

Commit Funding for Implementation – From the outset, it is important to stay focused on implementation issues, not the least of which is funding. This is an important element to keep the momentum going in blighted or declining areas that often have felt left behind for years. While it may not be realistic to have identified funding for all aspects of a proposed project in the early stages of development, it is important to identify key

components of the project that can be funded and accomplished early in the redevelopment process. For instance, streetscape and open space improvements are a logical place to start and offer reasonable projects that can be spearheaded by the local government as an incentive to entice future private development in the area.

## B. Relationship to the Comprehensive Plan

At the macro-level, a jurisdiction’s Comprehensive Plan defines the goals, objectives, policies, and implementation strategies that guide future development and redevelopment efforts either to existing infill sites, including greyfields, or available vacant land within the area. These guidelines and future land use recommendations are based on compiled data, maps, and lists of current community development projects and programs that will influence the future content and character of the community. Table 1 identifies information from each of the Comprehensive Plan elements that could be used to guide a successful greyfield redevelopment strategy. If your Comprehensive Plan does not encourage greyfield redevelopment, you can make these changes part of the next scheduled update of the Comprehensive Plan and Short Term Work Program.

**Table 1: Relationship of Comprehensive Plan and Greyfield Redevelopment**

<b>Comprehensive Plan Element</b>	<b>Examples of Useful Information</b>	<b>Examples of Supportive Polices</b>
<b>Population Element</b>	Number of future residents by age, income, family size	Support the diversity of incomes, ages, cultures and lifestyles in our community.
<b>Economic Element</b>	Number of new jobs created in the community in each employment classification	Encourage the retention and appropriate expansion of local-serving business opportunities within existing population centers.
<b>Natural &amp; Historic Resources Element</b>	Location of environmentally sensitive areas, natural and historic resources that make certain areas unsuitable for future development	Protect sensitive areas, prime forests and other natural and historic resources from unsuitable development.
<b>Community Facilities</b>	Location and capacity of schools, parks, libraries, streets, public transportation, water, and sewer service that would support greyfield redevelopment	Provide for the maintenance and improvement of public facilities in older areas, especially those capable of supporting greyfield redevelopment.
<b>Housing</b>	Age and condition of existing housing stock. Number of new housing units needed to meet projected population growth.	Provide incentives for mixed-income housing to be located closer to major employment centers.
<b>Land Use</b>	Location and acreage of current supply of vacant and undeveloped land. Amount and location of future development and redevelopment.	Promote the preservation of older neighborhoods through appropriate greyfield redevelopment where adequate public facilities exist.

## C. Administrative Enforcement Issues

### 1. Legal framework

When looking at greyfield sites located within suburban business districts, there are certain government implementation vehicles and instruments for public and private developers to consider when embarking on a program of redevelopment. For instance, local governments can create redevelopment agencies to undertake development and tax base enhancement in parts of their respective jurisdictions. These agencies are often granted the power of eminent domain, which can be a useful tool in greyfield redevelopment. A local government's prerogative to regulate land use control and zoning are also central to future greyfield development and valuation.

### 2. Political concerns and public acceptability

Typically, communities are so desperate for positive change with regard to greyfield sites that the debate is not whether to do something, but what should be done. Public involvement from the outset is critical in terms of managing expectations and crafting a common vision about what the priorities are for the greyfield site in questions. Sometimes, long-term residents are averse to densification particularly when it involves a range of housing options that might include rental units. However, this type of mix is critical to the success of many greyfield redevelopment projects. For this reason, community workshops and public engagement tools such as visual preference surveys can be useful in achieving early public buy-in and continued support. Additionally, the ability to demonstrate similar successes in other parts of the country by presenting case studies for greyfield redevelopment can be very persuasive in positively influencing public sentiment for the project.

### 3. Administrative complexity

The administrative complexity related to a greyfield redevelopment project is really a function of the size of the project and the number of partners involved. It is critical to establish a single implementation entity even if that entity represents a consortium of public and private interest groups. Specific redevelopment incentives can also add layers of complexity to a project. For instance the creation of a redevelopment agency can offer powers of eminent domain and the ability to achieve tax base enhancements, but also adds to the bureaucracy of the process.

### 4. Cost to implement

The cost to implement a greyfield redevelopment project will be a function of the size of the project and the number of players involved. Beyond the initial land acquisition costs, there may be expenses related to environmental abatement, burial of utilities, provision of additional public infrastructure such as water and sewer, not to mention site preparation such as grading and drainage. All of these factors should be analyzed thoroughly in the context of a detail urban design analysis. Furthermore, a market feasibility study should be completed early in the process to determine what the local market will bear in terms of a preferred mix of residential, commercial and recreational uses.

#### **IV. Implementation Guidelines for Greyfield Redevelopment – “12 Steps to Strip Recovery”**

1. Prepare Urban Design Analysis – A thorough understanding of the site from an urban design perspective is key to identifying future redevelopment opportunities. The greyfield site should be assessed in terms of topography, access, density, visibility, parking, setback and adjacencies. Photo documentation and mapping tools such as a GIS database are helpful in recording and evaluating existing conditions, particularly when comparing multiple potential sites. At the same time, a review of relevant case studies for similar types of projects is helpful in educating the public about the possibilities. Further, certain commercial activities often found near or in strip centers, notably gas stations and dry cleaners, are highly correlated with environmental contamination. Thus, it is essential that a predetermination be made of whether any portion of the greyfield site is brownfield so that it can be incorporated within the urban design analysis. Finally, a detailed review of existing development regulations should be completed to determine permitted development types.
2. “Prune” Retail Zoned Land – A surplus of retail-zoned land makes it easy to simply abandon existing commercial structures in favor of new development further from the city center, contributing to increased greyfield sites and sprawl. However, the zoning technique used by most suburban communities is to designate everything along the arterial highway strip for commercial uses and wait for retailers and developers to gradually fill in all of the individual sites. The result is that new development sprawls outward even as sites closer to the city remain vacant and older retail centers deteriorate. Retail over-zoning has the effect of extending commercial strips prematurely in discontinuous and inefficient ways as developers leapfrog over one another onto sites farther and farther from the city.

When economic conditions change, as they constantly do, some commercial strips are left to deteriorate even before they have been fully developed. This leaves them unfinished indefinitely, at risk to competition from newer and more enticing shopping environments, and difficult to revitalize because of their characteristic sprawl and lack of focus.

By pruning back the amount of land zoned for retail, suburban communities can stimulate retail growth, encourage revitalization, and improve the quality of their shopping strips. It simply is not necessary for every major parcel along every arterial to be zoned for commercial or retail use. The following steps can be taken to accomplish a reduction in retail-zoned land:

- Limit the quantity of commercially zoned land along emerging suburban strips to give landowners and retailers the incentive and economic strength to maintain a high-quality environment, react more swiftly to societal trends, and evolve on site as the retailing world changes.
- Rezone excess commercial land along older commercial corridors to encourage reinvestment and improve the quality of existing retail properties.
- Scale retail-zoned land to reflect a realistic assessment of the size, strength, and character of the market. [Note: May want to cite Atlanta’s Neighborhood Commercial District as an example of neighborhood-based retail.]
- Stimulate infill and greyfield redevelopment with new forms of mixed-use, including housing, office and pedestrian-oriented retail.

- Limit the extension of infrastructure – to prevent sprawl and congestion – as long as the existing infrastructure is underused.
- Structure zoning in mature strips to encourage denser forms of development that can be reached by multiple access modes.
- Reserve some of the previously zoned retail land for civic uses, recreational facilities, and open space.

Reduce opportunities for and resist predatory behavior on the part of competing big-box retailers and centers. [NOTE: Peachtree City recently adopted a big-box zoning ordinance that may be useful to cite. It limits the space size for single tenants. It also prohibits companies from holding the lease of a vacant space to prevent competitors from moving in.]

3. “Pulse” the Development – This concept refers to creating specific focal points for intense development connected by less densely developed areas or by open space. IN terms of greyfield redevelopment this simply acknowledges the need to focus on specific target areas (limited defined projects) along a commercial corridor rather than trying to impact an extended length of the thoroughfare. Ways to do this include:
  - Use key intersections or major transit stops to create cores of redevelopment that are unique points of reference (gateways); nodes of intense activity; and places that are friendly, attractive and walkable.
  - Plan and zone higher densities within target areas to facilitate a vertical mix of uses and to achieve pedestrian concentrations that create a lively, safe, attractive and entertaining streetscape.
  - Direct public investments in community facilities to these target areas to raise surrounding property values, encourage higher value uses within the zone, and to serve as anchors to entice future private investment.
  - Use the range of public development implementation tools such as transfer of development rights, business improvement districts, eminent domain, tax abatement, urban design guidelines, vertical zoning, etc. to focus greyfield redevelopment at specific “pulse points.”
4. Tame Traffic – Using roads as seams to connect various portions of the development, and providing pedestrian routes that minimize conflict with traffic. If possible, try to avoid using roads as edges that divide development and encourage faster driving speeds. Focus on site design that enhances pedestrian mobility.
5. Enhance Connectivity – Between commercial development and adjacent neighborhoods to reinforce a sense of community and create a vibrant environment conducive to living, working and recreation.
6. Eradicate Ugliness – By focusing on development standards that address signage, landscaping, lighting, architectural guidelines and pedestrian amenities. Often greyfield sites have immense amounts of surface parking that contribute to the blighted appearance of the area. Redevelopment of these sites offers opportunities to fill in these vast oceans of parking with new structures containing housing and commercial uses. Planners and designers should strive to locate parking in denser configurations such as in courtyards, behind buildings, or in decks that look like buildings.

7. Create Incentives for Mixed-Use Development – By modifying regulations (primarily related to zoning and land use) that preclude multiple uses within a single site. Encourage vertical zoning that would allow for a transition of uses between floors, such as ground floor retail or commercial with residential above. If the greyfield site is located near a transit line, then reduce parking requirements to minimize the need for additional surface lots. Insist on appropriate buffering between incompatible uses and take steps to ensure a reasonable transition between denser new development and any surrounding single-family residential neighborhoods.
8. Diversify the Character – Of the development by providing a variety of uses in an environment where people can live, work, shop and play. Specifically, the greyfield redevelopment project should accommodate a range of non-retail uses, including housing, offices, hotels, civic uses, and cultural, entertainment, and recreational activities. While it may not be possible to concentrate this much land use diversity within a single greyfield site, planners and developers should be mindful of the need to create a more lively human dimension and reinforce a sense of place that is distinct from the surrounding area.
9. Anticipate the Market – Since greyfield redevelopment often has the positive impact of adding households within a trade area, it can have the concurrent effect of increasing the buying power of a community. It is important to understand the way in which anticipated demographic changes will affect the retail sector. Need to be able to respond to changing demands by:
  - Being ready to respond to changing consumer preferences. For instance, in recent years one of the most prominent trends in the retail industry has been the emergence of town centers, and there is growing interest in storefront retail located in pedestrian-friendly, walkable settings.
  - Adapting the commercial strip or greyfield redevelopment site to emerging lifestyles, by mixing residential and retail uses in well-designed environments.
  - Providing a sense of community by developing public gathering spaces, a more livable environment and more convenience in daily life.
  - Making new amenities such as parks, recreational opportunities, entertainment and cultural activities, public services, and outdoor dining, central to the greyfield redevelopment concept.
10. Create a Place – Or a sense of community that is appealing from a variety of perspectives, including safety, comfort, dining, and physical attractiveness. It is helpful to include as many services as a community needs within the greyfield redevelopment concept. In so doing, the number of choices encountered is increased and the range of products sold is maximized. Similarly, round the clock activity can be achieved by incorporating a variety of residential uses in the form of live/work spaces, apartments above stores, townhouses and hotels. Requiring active uses along the sidewalks such as outdoor dining, interactive displays in shop windows, entertainment, and diverse architectural elements, styles, and setback can further enhance the vitality of a place.
11. Focus Your Resources on a Catalytic Project – Prioritizing redevelopment objectives is a critical step in the implementation process. When contemplating greyfield redevelopment, it is important to identify manageable project areas that can be improved and serve as catalysts for ongoing economic reinvestment in the area. It is unrealistic and unadvisable to expect the public or private sector to take on the

challenge of greyfield redevelopment independently, and thus is it important to identify the project components that each sector is best at achieving. For instance, the public sector might step up to the plate first with some initial infrastructure and public space enhancements to entice spin-off private sector development in later stages. Often a “demonstration project” such as a length of enhanced streetscape, or public park, or mixed-use development can serve to inspire ongoing waves of complimentary projects that build upon a common theme.

12. Facilitate Partnerships for Implementation – Coordinate mutual interests (businesses, residents, property owners) to establish an entity to guide implementation efforts. A successful greyfield redevelopment strategy will require coordinated planning and dissemination of market, economic, social, demographic, and traffic data and information to prospective investors, developers, retailers, consumers and public agencies. This necessitates public/private partnerships to take over the “ownership” of a project and manage its future, including marketing and promotion.

## **V. Lessons Learned**

1. Engage Public and Private Sectors (form Task Forces and Subcommittees)  
Successful greyfield redevelopment relies on strong partnerships between the public and private sectors to accomplish sustainable projects that will have a lasting impact on the surrounding community. Often it is incumbent on the public sector to make the initial investment in a greyfield site, particularly if that site lacks significant infrastructure or suffers from environmental contamination. However, once the public sector demonstrates their commitment to the success of the project, particularly by implementing tools such as land use and zoning amendments favoring mixed-use development or tax abatement strategies, the private sector is not far behind. An effective way to engage public and private representatives in the process is to form task forces and subcommittees that maximize the professional strengths and expertise of stakeholders. For instance, marketing and promotion are critical aspects in the early stages of a redevelopment project and these tasks often are not well suited to the staff of the local planning department. Tapping into private sector resources such as assigning a stakeholder with experience in public relations and communications as the head of a marketing subcommittee is an efficient way to stretch limited resources.
2. Utilize the Professional Expertise of a Multi-Disciplinary Planning Team  
This toolkit has stressed that the multiple facets of a greyfield redevelopment project create the need for a multi-disciplinary planning team. While the local planning department may spearhead the overall project, it is advisable to engage the services of a team of professionals with related experience in greyfield redevelopment. In particular, a team with expertise in the following areas will enhance the success-rate of a greyfield redevelopment project: market analysis, urban design, transportation planning, housing and retail development (especially in a mixed-use configuration).
3. Define a Catalytic Project  
Greyfield sites are often found along commercial strips located in suburban areas. Once thriving shopping centers, these sites are often the tangible result of the wasteful, sprawling development pattern that plagues much of suburban America. When older shopping centers are simply abandoned for newer sites further down the

road, it can be difficult to know where to start. Thus, it is recommended that initial efforts be limited to a defined target area, which will serve as a catalyst for future redevelopment in the vicinity. This catalytic project should be located on one side of the commercial corridor and, if possible, should take advantage of any existing transit along the corridor. As mentioned previously, the public sector often makes the initial investment to provide support and incentives for spin-off private development to follow.

4. Incorporate Circulation/Transportation Improvements

Often what makes greyfield sites such compelling redevelopment opportunities is the fact that they have so much underutilized surface parking. Typically, greyfield sites are solely auto-oriented with little or no consideration given to pedestrian mobility or other forms of circulation. However, a key objective of the redevelopment process should be to enhance connectivity both internal to the site and in relationship to other destinations in the vicinity. Since most greyfield redevelopment is likely to have a mixed-use orientation in support of a livable, sustainable, walkable environment, it is important to focus on transportation enhancements in conjunction with land use issues. Ideally, a greyfield redevelopment project would be located on an existing transit line or within walking distance. Pedestrian access, bicycle amenities, multi-use paths and greenways should also be considered as important design features to enhance circulation in and around the site.

5. Create Market-Based Strategies – Familiarity with current economic and demographic conditions and market projections is necessary to plan for sustainable revitalization covering both short- and long-term needs. Is there a mismatch between consumer desires and local goods and services? Planners should define the retail trade area of the mall, strip center, or former big box outlet. They should also provide a profile of the consumers as well as other businesses in the trade area. Solid market data will provide a realistic baseline around which productive discussion can take place and can help manage expectations about what is possible in the future.

6. Put Your Money and Regulations Where Your Policy Is<sup>iv</sup> – Public agencies, working with the private sector, need to take the steps necessary to ensure that a comprehensive, incremental improvement program is accomplished at the targeted greyfield site. There are several initiatives that can support this effort:

- Integrate public facilities into the redevelopment strategy. The location of these facilities will leverage private investment on surrounding sites, create a focus, and provide a convenient destination where residents can accomplish multiple tasks.
- Link zoning regulations to implementation plans, including effective by-right development standards as well as transfer of development rights.
- Create development standards to accompany new zoning regulations. These standards should address landscaping, signage, architectural quality, and pedestrian linkages.
- Provide regulatory options that facilitate parceling and land assembly to accommodate recommended changes in land use configurations.
- Create an aggressive nuisance abatement program to eliminate problems that inhibit achieving the kind of environment that facilitates the community's vision. For example, DeKalb County has vigorously enforced its signage ordinance

along Memorial Drive to clean up the corridor's image and support greyfield redevelopment efforts.

## **VI. Additional Resources**

Beyard, Michael D., and Michael Pawlukiewicz. *Ten Principles for Reinventing America's Suburban Strips*. Washington, D.C.: ULI – the Urban Land Institute, 2001.

Booth, Geoffrey, et al. *Transforming Suburban Business Districts*. Washington, D.C.: ULI – the Urban Land Institute, 2001.

Calthorpe, Peter, and William Fulton. *The Regional City: Planning for the End of Sprawl*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2001.

Hirschhorn, Joel S. and Paul Souza. *New Community Design to the Rescue: Fulfilling Another American Dream*. Washington, D.C.: National Governor's Association, 2001.

Leinberger, Christopher B. *Financing Progressive Development*. A Capital Xchange Journal Article Prepared for: The Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy and Harvard University Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2001.

O'Neill, David J. *The Smart Growth Tool Kit: Community Profiles and Case Studies to Advance Smart Growth Practices*. Washington, D.C.: ULI – the Urban Land Institute, 2000.

ULI – The Urban Land Institute. July 1995. *Shopping Center Renovation and Expansion: Info Packet No. 371*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Land Institute.

ULI – The Urban Land Institute. June 1997. *New Urbanism/Neotraditional Planning: Info Packet No. 338*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Land Institute.

## **VII. Appendices**

### **Appendix A: Case Studies**

The case studies for greyfield malls consist of three examples of recent and ongoing redevelopment projects at varying scales: regional mall, suburban strip shopping center, and adaptive re-use.

#### **REGIONAL MALL: EASTGATE MALL REDEVELOPMENT, CHATTANOOGA, TN**



**Eastgate Mall – “Before”**

#### **Overview**

In 1998, the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Regional Planning Agency, at the direction of the Mayor, commissioned a planning study to revitalize an older suburb centered on the Eastgate Mall, a 1960s-vintage shopping mall. Through a collaboration of public and private interests, including the mall owner, the community chose Dover, Kohl & Partners to facilitate the design and implementation of a master redevelopment plan for the mall and its environs. The plan is rooted in substantial reconfiguration of the mall property, infill development within the surrounding surface parking areas, and new development to reconnect the shopping center to the surrounding neighborhood and nearby office park. The mall is now being transformed into a real town center for the Brainerd area.

#### **Project Approach**

Dover, Kohl & Partners conducted a week-long public charrette inside the vacant mall, with the participation of over 300 local residents. Plans were created based on the advice and input of property owners, city officials, retail experts and traffic consultants. Gibbs Planning Group performed a void analysis to determine untapped market potentials and which new tenant mixes would be most feasible. Glatting Jackson performed a multi-modal transportation analysis examining automobile, transit, bicycle, and pedestrian opportunities. An emphasis was placed during the design process on creating a plan that could be implemented in incremental phases responding to market demand. The mall is to be gradually replaced with time-tested mixed use building types found in the best traditional town centers. Buildings will be arranged to form high quality, well-defined public streets and spaces, creating higher real estate values.



### **Key Design Elements for Change Over Time**

- A network of interconnected streets and blocks
- Buildings front streets and public spaces with parking in the rear
- Special sites for civic buildings
- Special public spaces
- Mixed-use buildings
- Pedestrian-friendly connections to adjacent neighborhood areas
- Greenway extends to major trail
- Adaptable to future transit opportunities

### **Current Status**

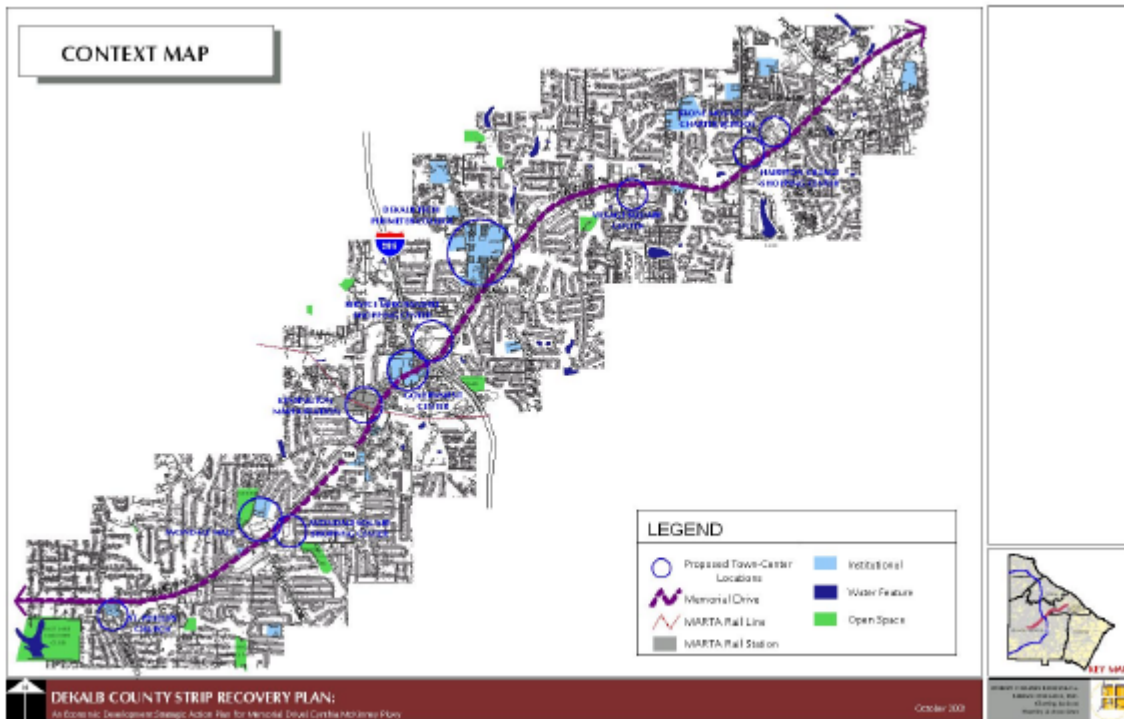
The master plan received immediate acclaim and was adopted by the City in 1998. Developers, business owners and government officials promptly began redevelopment consistent with the plan. Already, construction is being completed for the new town square and three defining buildings, businesses are leasing storefront space on the square, and the mall has re-leased the empty department stores as a large telemarketing center. In the first nine months, the shopping center properties went from less than 25% leased to more than 90% leased. The property was bought for approximately \$30 million, and then refinanced after completion of the master plan for approximately \$52 million. In July 1998, the monthly journal of the Urban Land Institute published extensive coverage describing this city-led success story. The plan and process were recently showcased by the Tennessee chapter of the American Planning Association as a model for other communities.

## **SUBURBAN: MEMORIAL DRIVE CORRIDOR, DEKALB COUNTY, GEORGIA**

### **Overview**

Memorial Drive is a multi-lane commercial corridor providing east/west access between downtown Atlanta and the local landmark of Stone Mountain. Known as the “Miracle Mile” in the 1980s with the highest concentration of restaurants and car dealerships in the metro Atlanta area, Memorial Drive is now littered with dead and dying strip malls. In an effort to reverse the economic decline plaguing the corridor, DeKalb County commissioned an economic strategic action plan for an eight-mile segment defined by Candler Road on the west and Stone Mountain Freeway on the east. The real estate advisory firm of Robert Charles Lesser & Co. led the multi-disciplinary planning team, which included Urban Collage, Inc. (urban design, site planning, and public participation), Glatting Jackson (transportation planning), and Huntley & Associates (implementation and public/private partnerships).

The study area is characterized by numerous low-density retail buildings, commercial strip centers, institutional facilities and moderate-income residential neighborhoods. Avondale Mall, DeKalb County Jail, Georgia Perimeter College, and DeKalb Tech are some of the economic generators along the corridor.



## Project Approach

The planning team recognized early in the process that it would be infeasible to create a master plan for the entire eight-mile segment of the corridor given obvious advantages that certain nodes along the corridor had over others. The planning team used the forum of a community workshop to brainstorm with stakeholders about potential redevelopment opportunities at four of the key activity centers along the corridor. Conceptual site plans were drawn for all four sites and presented to the county along with detailed market analysis assessing the level of opportunity over the short (1-5 years) and long term (6 years +).

The following sites were chosen as key catalysts for economic revitalization:

- Avondale Mall – An active mall located at the intersection of Memorial Drive and Columbia Road. The structure is slightly deteriorated, partially unoccupied and due to be closed at the end of the year in anticipation of a pending sale of the property for redevelopment. The County is considering utilizing the site as the location for a future performing arts/cultural center.

### Typical Design Strategies

- Create a mix of land uses in proximity, particularly housing; tie into surrounding land uses
- Using partial demolition and new construction, provide a mix of building sizes and uses (i.e. opportunities for smaller, local businesses in addition to larger, regional businesses)
- Break down scale of large buildings to provide individual expression
- Consolidate/centralize parking (typically through the use of decks – requires a “densification” of the site to justify economics)

- In some cases, reduce the overall quantity of parking (mall parking ratios are usually driven by holiday shopping demand)
  - Create outdoor focal point(s), plaza, greenspace
  - Add trees and landscaping to existing and new streets
  - Incorporate new, “urban” streets that re pedestrian-friendly and tie into the surrounding street grid
  - Make the development more accessible to mass-transit
- Kensington MARTA Station – This station is the second to last stop on MARTA’s east line and is surrounded by over 40 acres of parking and undeveloped land owned by MARTA. The site has excellent access to Interstate-285 and is in proximity to the DeKalb County Tax Commissioner’s Office and the DeKalb County Jail. Given the immediate access to transit and the concentration of municipal jobs in the vicinity, this location is highly suited to further development as an employment center that would include mixed-use development incorporating both high-density residential uses and additional office space.

#### Typical Design Strategies

- Organize growth to be dense and transit-supportive
  - Ensure diversity of land use with walking distance of transit station
  - Provide a variety of housing types to meet the needs of a mixed-income neighborhood
  - Create new and improved pedestrian links between transit station and existing office and residential uses
  - Develop higher density mixed-use immediately adjacent to transit station
  - Create “core commercial area”; add services that might be lacking in nearby community
  - Provide greenspace
  - Improve wayfinding signage and access to transit station
  - Develop on top of/above existing surface parking lots
  - Build structured and shared parking
  - Consolidate parcels
  - Revise existing zoning as needed
  - Develop design guidelines
- DeKalb Tech/Perimeter College – These two academic institutions are neighbors along the northwest side of the corridor. While both share an entrance off Memorial Drive, their primary orientation is to North Indian Creek Road. Both institutions have campus master plans that outline strategies for future expansion that would include a reorientation to Memorial Drive in order to enhance their visual presence along this major thoroughfare. While it is not anticipated that DeKalb County will play a significant role in the implementation of the campus master plans, it is acknowledged that these two academic institutions play a vital role in defining the image and identity of the corridor. Thus, the County is in full support of all initiatives intended to enhance the presence of these institutions.

### Typical Design Strategies

- Define an attitude towards the edge – how to address the street: major academic buildings, athletics, housing, shared facilities, parking, open space/landscape
  - Create a physical identity through architectural style, materials, landscape
  - Integrate compatible land uses; increase connections between existing residential, commercial and institutional uses
  - Develop a variety of housing types
  - Develop a flexible plan
  - Organize the campus into zones
  - Circulation – Develop a “front door,” manage traffic, parking
  - Increase pedestrian activity and enhance security
  - Develop a hierarchy of outdoor gathering spaces
  - Develop “village style” commercial/retail uses – cafes, bookstores, local entertainment
- Village Square/Value Mall – These adjacent retail sites are located on the southeast side of the corridor near the intersection of Memorial Drive and Hambrick Road. Both are partially unoccupied and the Value Mall is slightly deteriorated. Given the steeply sloping topography at the front of the site that contributes to poor visibility from Memorial Drive, neither site is suited for retail redevelopment. Instead, local stakeholders and County officials have identified this location as the site for a possible future recreation area that would provide facilities and programs for both youth and seniors. In addition, the expansive parking areas could be redeveloped to provide higher-density housing.

### Typical Design Strategies

- Accommodate a range of non-retail uses
- Create a “theme” for the area
- Add vitality by requiring active uses along sidewalks such as outdoor dining, interactive displays in shop windows, entertainment, and diverse architectural elements, styles, and setbacks
- Ensure that getting to and from the site is enjoyable and efficient; entry routes are as important as the place itself
- Enhance connectivity between commercial development and adjacent neighborhoods to reinforce a sense of community
- Incorporate new, “urban” streets that re pedestrian-friendly
- Surround big boxes with “sleeves” of retail and service uses to minimize blank walls and dead space

### **Current Status**

The final plan will be submitted to DeKalb County for approval in early December. The County has allocated \$11 million in infrastructure improvement funds, which will be targeted to at least two of the four identified activity centers. At the same time, the planning team is working with the County leadership to facilitate the formation of strategic partnerships with property owners and institutions to advance the redevelopment concepts articulated by the plan.

## EXURBAN: PHOENIX HIGH SCHOOL, GWINNETT COUNTY, GEORGIA



### Overview

In 1998, Gwinnett County Schools opened Phoenix High School in the former Lawrenceville West shopping center. The old Rose's Department Store and Winn Dixie supermarket that anchored the center are barely recognizable after the facility received a substantial facelift and the addition of classrooms, labs, a childcare center and a gymnasium. The decision to renovate the defunct strip mall into the new home for this non-traditional high school came as a result of the need to save time and money. The property was purchased for \$2.7 million, and the one-year comprehensive renovation/expansion cost \$5.4 million. In comparison, building a school from the ground up would have taken about two more years and cost an additional \$2 million. The centrally located site came with 800 parking spaces and the warehouse-style buildings were relatively easy to refurbish. The resulting 95,000 square foot facility has a capacity of just fewer than 1,000 students and there is room to expand. In addition to the instructional space, the school system's mainframe computer system and some administrative staff have moved into 41,000 square feet of office space within adjacent stores in the former strip center. The school, property and computer center combined represent a \$12.3 million total investment.

Architect: Lindsay Ponder Brayfield & Associates

Contractor: Foster & Co.

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<sup>i</sup> "Financing Progressive Development," Christopher B. Leinberger, The Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy, 2001, p. 2.

<sup>ii</sup> "Greyfield Regional Mall Study," Congress for New Urbanism and PricewaterhouseCoopers, Global Strategic Real Estate Research Group, 2001, p. 4.

<sup>iii</sup> "Greyfields Into Goldfields," Congress for New Urbanism and PricewaterhouseCoopers, Global Strategic Real Estate Research Group, 2001, p. 4.

<sup>iv</sup> "Ten Principles for Reinventing America's Suburban Strips," Beyard, Michael D., The Urban Land Institute, 2001, p. 22-23.