

Mixed-Use Development

There's a movement going on around the country and in this region for mixed-use development. It's the idea that putting shops and services next to housing is much more convenient for people and reduces infrastructure costs. Mixed-use developments take many forms: neighborhood commercial streets connected to adjacent residential areas, village main streets with residences above retail and offices, mixed-use city downtowns, suburban infill sites, and the conversion of traditional shopping malls and strips to "town centers".

Benefits

Well-designed mixed-use developments offer advantages in several important areas of public life:

Public Health

Walking and cycling are made more convenient, which gives people more opportunities to be physically active. Mixed-use also helps keep seniors independent when driving is no longer practical.

Public Expenditures

Mixed-use developments generally have fewer miles of roads and sewers than spread-out developments and require fewer municipal services. More "eyes on the streets" also enhance public safety.

Public Vitality

When implemented appropriately, mixed-use developments can increase business vitality, provide employment opportunities close to home, create a variety of housing choice, and create nodes of community life.



A vision for mixed-use development is to create centers of community life that provide regular, rewarding social opportunities.

Public History

Many of our villages and urban neighborhoods are already walkable and mixed-use. They have a sense of place that should be appreciated and preserved, for it would be costly, if not impossible, to duplicate if lost. While a neighborhood or street may contain a mix of uses, only a single use may be permitted in an individual building. Allowing both residential and commercial uses can breathe new life into mostly-vacant buildings.

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Role of Local Government

A successful mix of adjacent uses must be allowed in regulations. Local governments can encourage and facilitate mixed-use development in a number of ways:

- Expressly providing for mixed-use development in comprehensive plans and future land use maps
- Adopting form-based or hybrid zoning codes
- Creating mixed-use zoning districts or overlay districts
- Using zoning and development regulations to enable the conversion of large vacant sites or buildings to mixed-use developments
- Adopting incentives such as expedited approvals, density bonuses, and one-stop permitting.

Mixed-use is not feasible for all built environments. The typical post-World War II suburb in our region, for example, may lack the population and employment densities necessary to support a mix of uses.

Real estate markets, however, can change quickly, and architects and developers can come up with creative ideas.

All communities should therefore seriously consider allowing mixed-use development in at least some parts of the municipality.



Mixed-use zoning can help keep all floors of buildings occupied. For example, live/work units, common in mixed-use zones, offer buildings where business owners might run their businesses on the first floor and live on the second floor. Buyers of such buildings benefit because their monthly mortgage payments cover their business rent as well, typically one of the biggest expenses for small-business owners

Resources

The American Planning Association (www.planning.org) and the Urban Land Institute (www.uli.org) offer a wealth of information on mixed-use development.

- Genesee Transportation Council, October 2012