COMMERCIAL STRIP REDEVELOPMENT

Stop the spread of strip commercial zones lining our roadways and begin to reclaim the strip into more contained sub-centers with shared driveways and parking, higher quality landscaping and architecture, and a mix of adjacent uses.

Zip Up the Strip

A common complaint at the public workshops was the ugliness and traffic congestion created by strip development.

How did people define the strip?

- dependence on cars for every movement
- traffic jams; too many lights and driveways
- asphalt landscape of oversized parking lots
- big pole and wall signs in clashing colors
- lack of coordinated landscaping
- cheap-looking boxy architecture
- every town starts to look alike

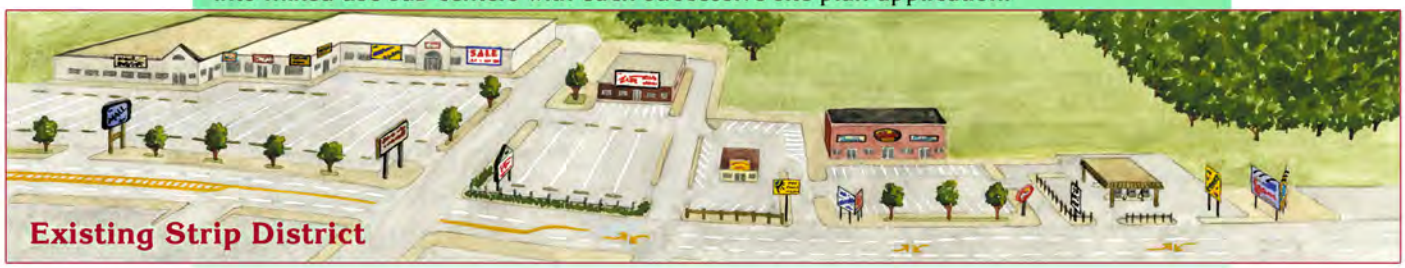
But people also like the convenience of discount stores, supermarkets, and popular restaurants. How can we accommodate the larger scale and convenience of highway business uses without having strip zones divide our communities in half and destroy their distinctive character?

First, put a firm limit on the length of any commercial district, and instead allow any necessary commercial expansion in greater depth. In this sense, shopping plazas and regional malls are preferable to long, narrow strip zones because they concentrate commercial uses and encourage shared parking and walking between stores. Commercial districts look and function best when larger "big box" uses and parking lots are placed to the rear with a connected row of smaller, more attractive storefronts set close to the road and along entrance drives. This screens the parking and establishes more traditional and walkable street frontages.

Then, transform the strip into a commercial boulevard with limited left hand turns. Multiple driveways for each use lead to traffic back-ups, more accidents, and the eventual need for expensive road widenings. Clustered commercial districts allow shared entrance drives spaced further apart and internal service roads to link nearby uses and parking lots. Every site plan is an opportunity to upgrade the landscaping with street trees, coordinate access, and slowly "zip up the strip" by making connections along and across the street.

Seven Steps to Retrofit the Strip

Communities can begin to reclaim existing shopping strips outside village and town centers by agreeing to a long-term redesign program that gradually transforms strips into mixed use sub-centers with each successive site plan application:



Existing Strip District

1. Restrict further development of outlying highway frontage and limit existing commercial districts to under 1/2 mile in length;

2. Consolidate entrances along the road to a few main driveways with internal service streets based on a block system to connect businesses in between;

3. Help unify the streetscape with continuous street trees, high quality landscaping, and, where possible, planted medians to prevent unlimited left hand turns;

4. Build sidewalks and crosswalks throughout the area to create connections to shared parking, public transportation, walking between stores and to nearby housing;

Coordinated Circulation and Landscaping

5. Fill in the fronts of large parking lots with small, closely spaced or attached storefronts to build a street frontage with courtyard parking behind;

6. With buildings up front, attractive architecture, wall signs and sidewalks can be featured along the frontage, not parking lots and pole signs;

7. Encourage a mix of housing and other uses adjacent to the shopping to begin to build a walkable neighborhood rather than a strictly commercial driving district.

Rebuilding a Commercial Center Step by Step