

# MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT:

*What was old is new again*



**By Randy Blankenhorn**  
Executive Director

*Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning*



**Tedd Carrison**  
Research Assistant

Over the next 30 years, the Chicago metropolitan area will grow by approximately 2 million people, which represents a quarter of the region's population as of 2000. This influx of people — and their impact on land use, transportation, the environment, the economy, and other factors — will provide significant challenges for northeastern Illinois and its communities. Development decisions being made today by local officials, planners, and builders will significantly affect how the region will look in the year 2040.

In anticipation of this future, many planning experts — including the staff at the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) — are actually looking to the past. Prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century's advent of formal zoning regulations and mass-produced automobiles, land use in most of the region's early cities followed an intuitive pattern. Anchored by a commercial street or intersection, residences emanated outward and often upward, permitting people

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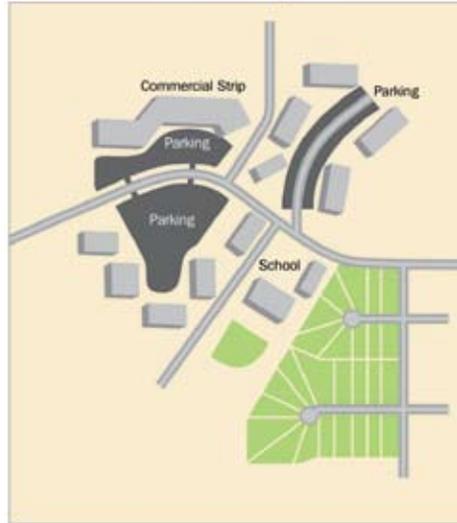
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to live close to where they worked and shopped. Trains flourished, but personal transportation was only as efficient as the quickest horse, so land uses were often mixed. The shopkeeper would live above her store. The dentist would practice beside his home. This proximity also satisfied reciprocal needs. The shopkeeper never went far with a toothache, and the dentist could walk to buy his groceries.

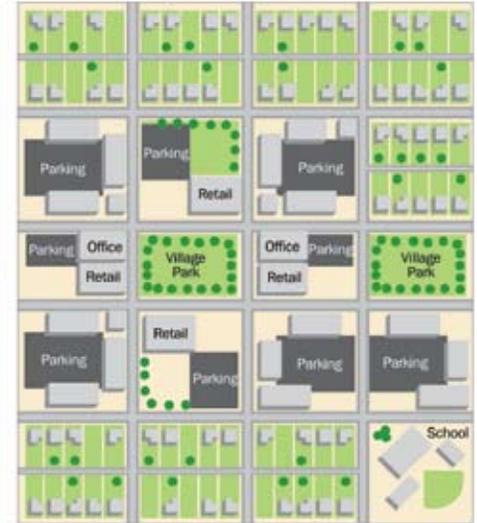
Although the horse and buggy are a distant memory, many city planners and developers are returning to this model. Mixed-use, New Urbanist, or Smart Growth developments — the new names of an old brand — seek to better reconcile land's fixed supply with its ever-growing demand by promoting compact, multi-purpose construction that is often sited near transit. The benefits of mixed-use development and redevelopment include convenience, economics, health, environment, and

**Comparing hierarchical and connected road systems**

Conventional hierarchical road system



Connected road system



The conventional hierarchical road system, illustrated on the left, has many dead end streets and requires travel on arterials for most trips. A connected road system, illustrated on the right, allows more direct travel between destinations and makes non-motorized travel more feasible.

Sources: Todd Litman, "Land Use Impacts on Transport" Virginia Transport Policy Institute, 2005; illustration from Kulash, Anglin and Marks 1990; CMAP.

aesthetics. It allows residents to work, shop and dine within steps of their homes. It helps preserve open space and maximizes the benefits of existing infrastructure, while creating vibrant,

walkable corridors where pedestrians mingle and eclectic businesses thrive.

People walk or cycle more often when amenities (e.g., parks, businesses) are available close to home. Mixed-use

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developments place these amenities within a convenient distance from housing and facilitate non-automotive travel through shortened blocks, greater access to transit, use of traffic-calming devices (e.g., stop signs, roundabouts, successive crosswalks), and clearly delineated pedestrian space.

The prevalence of pedestrian traffic yields many benefits, including a constant flow of patrons for local businesses. This is in contrast to the strip mall phenomenon, in which businesses are often spread over a large area and separated by parking lots, so consumers cannot easily wander from store to store. Under that model, a trip for light bulbs usually begins and ends at the stand-alone hardware store. With mixed-use development, a variety of businesses are concentrated in corridors that are appealing — and often necessary — to walk through. The invitation to window shop makes merchandise more conspicuous to passers-by, meaning a trip that begins at the hardware store can continue to the furniture store and end at the bike shop. This is good for businesses that get walk-up traffic, good for consumers who have multiple options in easy walking distance, and good for reducing traffic on our congested roads.

Additionally, as development spreads to the fringes of the region, pristine greenspace becomes less common and more precious. Local referenda to conserve natural areas are gaining popularity, demonstrating that the importance of open space is not lost on the general public. Mixed use can curb the rapid consumption of land that has reduced the region's forests, wetlands and prairies. It also spurs a healthy shift in transportation options, with a lesser emphasis on automobiles and a greater emphasis on more environmentally friendly modes, like transit, biking, and walking. Open space can even be incorporated into mixed use, often in the form of a courtyard or plaza. These gaps in the built environment can serve as exhibition areas and allow users to congregate in a central, scenic location.

Mixed-use blocks are often more aesthetically attractive than communities with highly separated land uses. This is especially true when

historic preservation is integrated into a development, as evidenced by the success of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street program (<http://www.mainstreet.org/>). Main Street seeks to revitalize historic downtowns by restoring architecture and enhancing commercial viability — often with a mixed-use element — leaving them much as they were before the land-use paradigm changed following World War II.

Though that was a decades-long evolution, the most dramatic shift occurred when the geographic relationship between home and workplace became more tenuous following construction of the interstate highway system in the 1950s. While the interstates have brought phenomenal mobility and economic advantages that we too often take for granted, they also contributed to a fragmentation of communities. The high density of the "city" — which for many symbolized pollution, poverty, and crime — contrasted unfavorably with the safe and verdant image of the "suburb."

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# THE BENEFITS OF MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT AND REDEVELOPMENT INCLUDE CONVENIENCE, ECONOMICS, HEALTH, ENVIRONMENT, AND AESTHETICS.

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Accordingly, many suburbs that matured after World War II adopted zoning policies that rigidly separated land uses. Clovers of residential cul-de-sacs — streets specifically designed to limit mobility — extended in isolation from commercial districts and office parks. America's "main streets" were replaced by expressway interchanges lined with big-box stores, shopping malls and fast-food restaurants. As undeveloped land dwindled close to the urban center, home buyers and developers have increasingly looked to collar counties where land has been cheaper and more abundant. But that continuing trend brings significant costs to the region as a whole, not the least of which is increased congestion and commute times.

Mixed-use development and redevelopment are not novel concepts, but they are riding a strong new surge

of interest. In Skokie, for example, work is underway to overhaul a stretch of West Dempster Street, replacing out-dated suburban development with a more compact mix of condos, offices, and businesses — all within walking distance of a rail station. Communities like Libertyville, La Grange, Homer Glen, Glenview, and Waukegan are other good examples of mixed use in action. They should resonate as prominent models to other municipalities and developers examining their own land-use plans.

Many residents of metropolitan Chicago have gained a new appreciation for the old-time concept of a walkable town center with compact development and mixed uses. While those centers have often developed along Metra rail lines, the availability of mass transit is not an absolute requirement. For example, the Village of Burr Ridge is creating from scratch a village center with mixed-use development that is appealing to upscale residents who prefer a walkable community. In a sense, they're emulating the quaint lifestyle of much older communities

such as tiny Elburn, a village 46 miles west of the Loop with a new Metra station that is giving residents of that longtime rural community the option of commuting by train to jobs in the City of Chicago. In disparate towns like these, developers are finding receptive markets among municipal leaders, planners and residents for a style of development whose time seems to have come — once again.



*The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning was created recently to integrate planning of land use and transportation in the seven counties of northeastern Illinois. Visit [www.cmap.illinois.gov](http://www.cmap.illinois.gov) for more information.*



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