



The Next Dublin: Reimagining the Suburb

2013 Transforming Local Government Conference

Category: Economic Vitality

Jurisdiction

City of Dublin, Franklin County, Ohio

City Manager

Marsha Grigsby

Innovation Award

Yes

Rapid Fire Session

No

Project Leader

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Synopsis

Objectives

This project wasn't about embracing New Urbanism, or designing a program for place making; it was instead looking to the needs of future generations. Consider the two polar views displayed to the right. Whichever is correct (and, in some respects, both may be), Dublin will need to get ahead of our demographics - the same demographics that are changing the face of the country. The Bridge Street District plan was initiated to create a vision that would shape the future of Dublin's central core to address these changes. This market-based study involved the development of strategies to:

- Look closely at changing demographic and housing trends affecting Dublin by examining the emerging housing preferences of the future workforce, and studying the growing trend toward the creation of mixed-use, walkable environments in suburban communities around the country;
- Enhance the strong character of the city's historic village core;
- Determine opportunities for additional high-value commercial, hospitality, retail, residential and mixed-use development;
- Develop new and sustainable futures for distressed auto-oriented retail centers;
- Expand access to public places for gathering and recreation; and
- Ensure the long-term sustainability of Dublin from social, economic and environmental perspectives.

Innovations

Certainty of Development

Dublin has been well-known as a community where development quality was achieved through negotiation, usually through a planned unit development zoning process. While the results of this process were wildly successful, it made for unpredictability and expansive approval timelines. Departing from what became a standard development process was a challenge that could only be overcome by devising a clear vision for the community (with a particular emphasis on the Bridge Street District), inserting a highly detailed development

The subprime crisis is just the tip of the iceberg. Fundamental changes in American life may turn today's McMansions into tomorrow's tenements... If gasoline and heating costs continue to rise, conventional suburban living may not be much of a bargain in the future. And as more Americans, particularly affluent Americans, move into urban communities, families may find that some

of the suburbs' other big advantages—better schools and safer communities—have eroded. Schooling and safety are likely to improve in urban areas, as those areas continue to gentrify; they may worsen in many suburbs if the tax base—often highly dependent on house values and new development—deteriorates.

"The Next Slum?" Chris
Leinberger, *The Atlantic*,
2008

Suburbs are the nexus of American life, have been for decades, and will certainly remain so (because, like, where else are we going to put the next 100 million Americans?). Suburbs are where the majority of Americans today, and in the future, live, work, shop, create, consume, recreate, educate and, perhaps most importantly, procreate... Repeat after me again: "mixed-use." OK? I'm not talking about New Urbanism

or smart growth, which are concepts whose utility and desirability are debatable. I'm talking about the availability, in a suburban setting, to access services and amenities, or what Wally Siembab calls "smart sprawl" – retrofitting suburbs of any density so that residents can shop, obtain services and work all within a mile or two of their home."

"The Future of Suburbs?"
Suburbs are the Future,"
Roger Selbert, 2008

code designed to achieve that vision, and ensuring compliance with that code. Accomplishing this allows developers a greater degree of certainty and predictability.

Administrative Development Approvals

A critical element of Certainty of Development was the ability to institute an administrative development approval process. Most development in the District is now approved by an internal Administrative Review Team (or ART) consisting of the major departments responsible for development reviews, but including input from the Dublin Police Department and

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Economic Development, who traditionally were not involved in the development review process. The approval process includes time limits for decisions, which has not only reduced the timeline for zoning approvals, but better prepares the applicant for the building permit and construction process.

Melding Land Use Planning and Traffic Engineering

This project required re-tasking the transportation system from a suburban emphasis on arterial roads, to a gridded street pattern designed to distribute traffic over multiple routes. The transportation system was planned to accommodate the higher density, mixed land use development pattern. This required very close cooperation by the land use and transportation planners, accomplished through internal staff/consultant charrettes.

Challenges

By virtually any measure, Dublin is the most successful suburb of the central Ohio region. Home to dozens of corporate headquarters, nationally ranked school systems, and attractive homes and neighborhoods, Dublin is the “address” new residents and businesses desire. Voted “Best Suburb” by Columbus Monthly in 2012, the City boasts an outstanding record of planning and economic development foresight. So why do anything different? In some respects, Dublin suffers from its own success. An easy attack on the Bridge Street District plan’s objectives was the classic “if it’s not broken...” We’ll discuss how we overcame this potential major obstacle to change.



Applying the Project to the Real World

Public Benefits and Measures of Success

Zoning Approvals

Traditionally, Dublin’s zoning process has involved a lengthy rezoning process that could take a year or longer to complete. This left the City with a reputation as a difficult place in which to gain zoning approvals. In fairness, part of this time was taken up by developers not always understanding the level of development quality demanded by the City. This project put zoning districts in place over a land area exceeding 800 acres, in addition to an administrative review process. Rather than insisting on quality development on a negotiated case by case basis, the City adopted a form based code that codified the site and architectural standards it typically sought through the lengthy planned development approvals. This allowed for a significant reduction in the zoning approval process.

Public/Private Partnerships

Nearly every project in the Bridge Street District will require a high level of cooperation between the City and private development interests. For example, the transportation element of the vision for the Bridge Street District dictated the establishment of a gridded street system, served by a limited number of major roads and associated infrastructure, including bridges over the Scioto River that passes through the community. While the City has financial resources, it cannot acquire all the land necessary nor build all of the streets needed to serve a densely developed area. Accordingly, many projects require development agreements that lay out the City’s responsibilities as well as expectations from developers, such as dedication of rights-of-way and/or street construction. The costs to the developer are intended to be offset by the amount of additional development density permitted by the new zoning. Major public investment, including community open space, bridges, and parking structures are also anticipated.

Sustainable Development Practices

A key element of this project was to support the City’s ongoing initiatives related to sustainable practices. For example, an objective during the implementation of this

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project is to increase the use of alternative travel methods, particularly transit and bicycles. The proposed residential densities of the Bridge Street District, at least 3-5 times the density the City had permitted in the past, is intended in part to attract expanded transit service. Streets will include bicycle infrastructure, including cycletracks and shared lanes. An increased emphasis on pedestrian movement is another critical element.

Benefits to Other Communities

Knowledge Transfer

While there are projects throughout the nation that are similar to Dublin's, few take on the scope of area and complexity undertaken for the Bridge Street District. In all, the project area was over 1,000 acres, including the heart of the city's commercial area, a vital historic district, a major river bisecting the area, and several major corporate interests with a large stake in the project's outcome. The methodology used for the study, including an extensive education process, development impact assessments, and thorough land use and transportation planning, can all serve as great lessons in implementing transformational projects, policy development, use of form based codes, and the alteration of well established development patterns.

Support of Elected Officials

No project of this scope can be successful without the full and enthusiastic support of a community's elected officials. This was no less true for Dublin. Rather than jumping into a full-blown study and code development, City staff began scheduling a series of nationally recognized speakers to look at the city and put it in the context of future generations. Many questions were asked, and the information provided by these experts was expertly probed by our elected officials, other community leaders and business interests. In the end, the Dublin City Council embraced this effort by including completion and implementation of the plan as a top priority in its annual goals. This support continued through all of the study and plan development efforts, through the adoption of the form based code, and now through a clear goal encouraging the implementation of the Bridge Street District's future.

Project Costs

Visioning

Goody Clancy & Associates
\$354,233

Code Development

Clarion Associates & Farr Associates
\$164,879

Consultants

(Lead members only)

Visioning

Goody Clancy & Assoc.
David Dixon; david.dixon@goodyclancy.com

Form Based Code Development

Clarion Assoc. & Farr Assoc.
Don Elliott; dellott@clarionassociates.com
Leslie Oberholtzer; leslie@farrside.com

Development Modeling & Technical Assistance

Transportation
Nelson/Nygaard
Rick Chellman; rchellman@nelsonnygaard.com

Public Utilities

EMH&T (Water & Sewer) and

CDM (Stormwater Management)
Shane Spencer
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Research & Education

Development Trends and Demographic Shifts
Brookings Institution | Christopher B. Leinberger
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Housing Trends & Market Analysis
Zimmerman Volk | Laurie Volk
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Commercial Trends & Market Analysis
W-ZHA, LLC | Sara Woodworth
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Future Workforce Needs
CEOs for Cities | Carol Colletta
<http://www.twitter.com/ccoletta>

Beyond Enhancement to Transformative

While many projects enhance existing assets – downtowns, major street corridors, or parks – **the Bridge Street District project is intended to transform a typical suburban commercial area into a modern, high quality, densely developed urban core.** Getting there will take time; but Dublin adheres to the principles of the “3 Ps:” Have a Plan, be Persistent, and be Patient.

Presentation Style

We intend to walk the conference attendees through a journey of one person's life; from living in the city of Dublin today, to sometime in the future when the project has been fully implemented. How did this project affect this person's lifestyle, daily routines, and their outlook for the future? How will changes in the physical development of the community in turn change the community itself, considering that the city is today a thriving and successful, if somewhat typical, suburban community? We will demonstrate the (r)evolutions in demographics and lifestyle being addressed by this transformative project through the eyes of one person.

The journey through time will follow the experience of this resident as they might appear through the long term implementation of this project. We will "age" this person through the years as we conduct periodic "interviews" through time. This will be the thread that ties the presentation through the various stages, from today to the full project implementation, as described below.

The presentation will be an integrated presentation and video through four stages:

A. Dublin Today

Brief history of development; catalysts for growth

Our Resident: Growing up in Dublin

B. Changing Trends

Demographic shift; lifestyle changes; growth of urban areas

Our Resident: Getting out into the world; new phase of life and changes in lifestyle

C. Getting in Front of the Wave

Project initiative; City Council support; community education process; Vision and development code development and adoption

Our Resident: Understanding the trends and getting involved; determining what the changes mean for them

D. The Next Dublin

Vision implemented; transportation, recreation, working, daily life in the New Dublin

Our Resident: Aging with the New Dublin: a day in the life

