

*Inspiring creative infill development
in your borough*

FILL 'ER UP

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Redvelopment in major metropolitan centers occurs all the time, without much pomp and circumstance. Infill development is not a hobby for Philadelphia or Pittsburgh; it is *modus operandi*. There, all vacant land and lost spaces are filled in with hotels, retail shops, condos, cafes, parking structures and open space amenities. No land goes to waste. These traditional urban areas are seemingly never full enough.

Our smaller communities can take a cue from our neighboring metro areas. The recent perception in many of Pennsylvania's smaller municipalities is that density and infill are not terms to use in planning and redevelopment strategies. But that tide is starting to turn, thanks in part to an increased emphasis of reinvestment in Pennsylvania's downtown centers throughout the current gubernatorial administration.

Planners and officials must continue to look for ways to grow within their municipal boundaries while retaining the charm and character that makes them unique. This growth can occur quite elegantly through creative infill development - the development of vacant or underutilized land within an established downtown core.

This type of "smart growth" can have multiple benefits for the community, including:

- allowing local stakeholder businesses to expand and bolster the local economy
- creating new opportunities for start-up businesses
- adding desirable housing opportunities within an established mixed-use core

Getting a community to recognize their opportunities for infill development is often easier said than done. Getting stakeholders to recognize infill development as a viable option is equally challenging.



FIGURE 1 The planning process in Lititz incorporated infill development. In this sketch, an existing professional office is given room to expand, maintains their ground level parking, and mitigates flood plain issues.

However, there are ways to inspire both groups to shift their thinking and begin to support the paradigm.

During early planning discussions in any community, certain needs are identified, such as office space, residential units, light industrial use or simply mixed-use space on "Main Street." As planners, we have to find a logical place to fit these needs into the existing fabric of the community. It is critical to use creativity of design to get people to think beyond the norms of development. The norms being green field development on the edges of our town centers with expansive parking compounds and sterile architecture.

The following three examples describe creative infill solutions that were developed as part of a larger planning process. These plans addressed the positive or negative aspects of parking, circulation, utilities, adjacent physical character, and general sense of place in sensible and creative ways. Each demonstrates opportunities to reinvest in three very different and unique communities across Pennsylvania.

Lititz, Lancaster County

If a large downtown office user in your borough wants to grow, let them! But how?

As planners, we strive to inspire creative solutions that relate to the surrounding community. For Lititz, this meant addressing a significant floodplain and the need for parking adjacent to the office building within the context of the overall downtown master plan.

For the downtown office user, the solution was right in front of us – build up and over the cars. In this scenario, we maintain the existing parking, stay clear of the floodplain and provide the room for expansion.

To describe the solution with words is one approach, but to show a sketch (Figure 1) of the concept goes miles toward getting buy-in from the community and the stakeholder whose office space is likely to grow. The combination of plans and sketches shows how infill fits in this scenario.

Admittedly, the sketch answers some questions while creating others, but this causes dialogue to occur and that is important to



FIGURE 2 Reconfiguring an existing surface parking lot made room for infill development - in this case, new housing units in Waynesboro. These multi-story residential units complement the character of the street and screen the remaining parking that is now tucked behind.

moving the idea from paper to reality.

Waynesboro, Franklin County

Embracing your position as a bedroom community means meeting the need for diverse housing types.

In Waynesboro, development pressure in the surrounding township created the desire to explore infill-housing options for the borough. Currently, traditional single-family development surrounds the core downtown with little market-rate town home options close to the downtown. Second Street in Waynesboro has a dense residential character until a large surface parking lot interrupts the scale and architectural edge.

Through the planning process, the idea was born – use a portion of the surface parking lot along Second Street for infill development of town homes along the street (Figure 2). These additional homes not only meet a need in the community, but through creative planning, they fill

a gap along Second Street while screening the parking lot from clear view. [Also, these new homes are across the street from Henicle Market, a must see for any visitor to Waynesboro.]

Emmaus, Lehigh County

Having a thriving light industrial base in your borough can be a great benefit. Having that same base with room to expand is even better.

Emmaus enjoys a long-sustained light industrial district with users who are growing and need room to expand. The area is landlocked by a rail line to the north, the south mountain (to the south) and residential neighborhoods to the east and west. To continue to meet the needs of its users and allow room for expansion, infill was an ideal option.

An existing surface parking lot was reconfigured to provide adequate parking for a grouping of new flexible space office and industrial buildings. (Figure 3) This new infill construction would match

the character of the existing brick buildings along Seventh Street, which is adjacent to the site. The infill creates an architectural edge to the street while providing a much-needed gateway into this industrial zone.

No matter the use – professional office expansion, increased residential units, more industrial space or something else – there are certain benefits inherent to infill development. First, there is the existing fabric of our Pennsylvania communities. This fabric includes all the essential and non-essential services that already exist in the downtown area. Proximity to the post office, a FedEx or UPS pick up point, restaurants, coffee shops, places to shop and places to do business away from the office make our downtowns the ideal mixed-use environment.

Additionally, it is likely that all of these services are within easy walking distance. The walk-ability of

our communities is another benefit to infill development.

Lastly and maybe most importantly, is the availability of infrastructure. One could argue that there is no more development-ready site than an infill site. Sewer, water, electric, natural gas, telecom lines – they are all there and all ready for a new user to join the grid.

As a side note, our office has been in downtown Lititz for almost 67 years. When people ask us why we have stayed here for all that time, our responses are generally that it is the perfect place to do business. Our insurance agent is next door, the coffee shop is up the street, you can grab a sandwich at a half dozen spots over lunch, get a drink after work, buy a gift for practically anyone or pay the water bill, all without moving your car. Of course, maybe you walk to work, so moving the car has never been an issue in the first place.

Identifying areas that are appropriate for infill development

can be a difficult first step. The right planning team can help you navigate this step early on in the process and can help you inspire creativity for reinvesting in your borough.

Once locations are identified, deciding what can fit in those spaces is the creative part. Involve your community in this process! Often the best and most successful solutions for infill development will resonate with a variety of stakeholders and community officials. These are the options that will make people say, “I never thought we could do that.”

You can do this. And that creative infill development concept just may lead to a shift in the way your community thinks about its lost spaces and underutilized land. **(B)**

About the Author

Chris Brown is a designer and master planner with Derck & Edson Associates. For the past eight years, Chris has worked with many Pennsylvania boroughs to inspire creativity in



FIGURE 3 A thriving light industrial base of business was in need of room to grow. Infill development provided the answer. Again, reconfiguring surface lots provides room for new tenants and creates a more unified streetscape. In the plan image, dark buildings are new and light orange are existing with adaptive reuse.

the planning process. Chris earned his Bachelor's Degree in Landscape Architecture from the Pennsylvania State University.



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