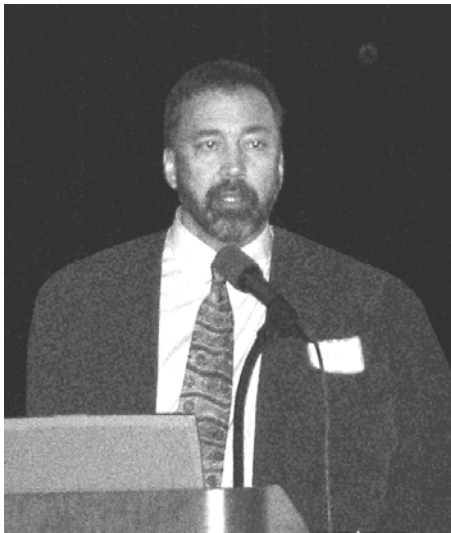


Communities By Design, a
nonprofit 501c(3) training and education
organization, in cooperation with the
City of Redwood City,
is pleased to present:

The Forum *at Redwood City*

A CONTINUING CONVERSATION ON CITY DESIGN



Leaving the Mall Behind: *Creating Robust Urban Shopping Districts in a Suburban World*

2007-08 SEASON: FORUM #6
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 5, 2008
HISTORIC LOBBY OF THE FOX THEATRE
2215 BROADWAY
REDWOOD CITY
6:00 P.M. - 7:45 P.M.

On March 5, 2008, the City of Redwood City and the nonprofit "Communities by Design" held the sixth presentation of the 2007-2008 Forum season. The Forum featured a presentation by **Seth Harry**, Principal and Founder of Seth Harry and Associates, Inc., Architects and Planners, on "Leaving the Mall Behind: Creating Robust Urban Shopping Districts in a Suburban World."

Mr. Harry began his presentation by relating retail markets to urban transects and the New Urbanism. He defined the transect as a way to look at urbanism at different scales and at different intensities. The urban transect has six categories ranging from nature - T1 and farmland - T2, to low density suburban - T3, more density - T4, mixed-use with transit - T5, to the most intensely developed urban area of a city - T6. The transect is most often used by planners to help reconstitute the urban fabric of cities, especially in areas that have been degraded. Mr. Harry uses the transect as a tool to understand what is an appropriate level of retail for a particular area to have.

While New Urbanism is often critiqued for not delivering retail, Mr. Harry argued that transect-based planning and the New Urbanism can create compact and walkable places that support retail types appropriate to their respective transect zones. Different from conventional suburban development, which is auto-based, low-density, and single-use, transect-based development is compact, physically complex, pedestrian-friendly, and supports a wide range of transportation options and a wide range of uses.

Mr. Harry addressed the difference between the different types of mixed use: vertical and horizontal. He advised planners that it is important to qualify the kind of mixed use that you want in terms of the market, whether vertical or horizontal. His goal is often a combination of vertical mixed use around a dense core with good horizontal connectivity.

To better understand the retail environment, Mr. Harry described the characteristics that distinguish different retail types, and factors that influence a retail center's makeup and performance. In addition to relative proximity of the retail within the urban transect, characteristics that distinguish retail centers include scale, tenant mix, and intended trade areas. Factors influencing a retail center's makeup and performance include tenant mix, overall size of the center, sizes of key tenants, access and visibility, targeted market, and the competitive context.

The Suburban Conundrum: "As density goes down, typically both the road and the box [store] sizes go up."

-Seth Harry

Mr. Harry presented a pyramid diagram describing retail markets in different transect zones, showing how retail types are influenced by their urban transect zones. Between transects T2-T3, a neighborhood in the countryside can sustain a small market, transects T3-T4 can support a shopping center, transects T4-T5 might have main street type of shops, and transects T5-T6 might contain downtown shopping districts. He said that while this model works well to determine the kind of retail appropriate for cities using a very rational way of planning, reality is often somewhat messier and some of the most difficult areas to plan are hybrid market areas.

Reilly's Law of Retail Gravitation:
"People will travel to the largest place most easily reached."

- Seth Harry

Whereas urban consumer markets are largely determined by density and proximity, the emergence of the automobile has shifted the relationship between retail and proximity. Mr. Harry said that in a suburban sprawl

environment, retailers realized that if they positioned themselves in between centers, they could capture multiple markets, which resulted in hybrid markets that are neither urban nor suburban. People are now obliged to travel much further for things that used to be located in their neighborhoods, and hybrid consumer markets are largely determined by the size of the road and the size of the box (store). Retail centers at these hybrid marketplaces compete with urban centers, and have taken away from the markets that urban centers traditionally supported.

Furthermore, a relatively new form of hybrid market – the suburban "lifestyle" centers – fall short of accomplishing true urbanism, as they are essentially "park and walk" shopping malls located at the intersection of major highways. Nevertheless, Mr. Harry asserts that these lifestyle centers have many components of an urban fabric, and with time and phased infill development, these retail centers can be integrated into the surrounding context with improved connectivity, a mix of uses and added densities.

Mr. Harry also shared how to transition from a suburban environment to an urban environment, which are different in terms of their customer base and

"You need to understand the market context in which you are working. You need to know where the market is today and you need to know where it is going."

-Seth Harry

their focus. Even though a center may start off as suburban-oriented, it can still evolve into a much more urban form. Over time, as places develop and density increases, a sub-arterial will become an urban downtown boulevard, and surface parking lots will become future development sites.

Mr. Harry shared some strategies employed by his firm to support retail in a regional transect-based context. In El Salvador, his firm directed traffic to a downtown shopping center and stretched out the connecting thoroughfare in the downtown to capture more of the retail market. Mr. Harry used a similar strategy to address competition with a retail mall in Chico, CA, creating a shortcut created to the town center and attracting retail tenants. Lastly, he showed how an aggressive infill redevelopment project in a suburb of Chicago can successfully work by drawing key tenants and having the right mix of housing and retail.

In conclusion, Mr. Harry advised planners to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of the cities they are working in to better understand their city's position in a competitive marketplace context. He recognized growing macro-trends that are favoring urbanism (like increasing gas prices), and reiterated the opportunities retail has to contribute to rich urban centers over time.

"The tool that you use to get to where you are going is less important than knowing where you want to go."

-Seth Harry