

Chapter 9

*Conclusion:
Next Steps*

The need to grow from within rather than ever outward provides an impetus to cooperate in new ways. In planning for sustainable redevelopment, communities can construct a framework to provide quality infrastructure and services at the lowest cost; to give citizens a much greater degree of control over the future of their neighborhoods and communities; and to protect rural lands while enhancing the livability of our cities and towns.

-- Redevelopment for Livable Communities¹

Suisun City and Tualatin Commons are excellent examples of suburban downtowns that have used redevelopment to reverse negative trends associated with peripheral sprawl and city center disinvestment. Their message applies to hundreds of suburban communities across America: redevelopment may not be easy, but it is feasible and, indeed, necessary. Other projects--The Crossings, Mizner Park, The Village at Shirlington, Uptown District, RiverPlace, and many more--prove that efforts to reinvigorate communities by renovating and rebuilding in declining areas can be greatly successful, and very essential, as well.

City leadership in Suisun City and Tualatin alike worked with citizens and quality design teams to develop a vision of the community core they wanted, and then worked diligently with both the public and private sectors to achieve those means. Redevelopment in both cases is not complete, but then cities are organic, constantly evolving, and growth toward sustainability is never complete. It is not a finite location, but a constant

endeavor.

Redevelopment must first and foremost be as unique as the community it affects. It must involve citizens and elected representatives. It must be based on a community vision, with attainable goals. It must incorporate physical land uses--pedestrian orientation, environmental preservation and enhancement, public spaces--that secure its prominence and success over the long term. Overall, sustainable downtown redevelopment must take into account economic, environmental (built and natural), and social consequences both before and after construction.

Creating more livable suburban communities with their own identities, yet which function in a regional context, demand productive development that counteracts sprawl. The good suburb demands sustainable suburban downtown redevelopment.

Next Steps

The research discussed in this report is an ongoing process, and could head in several directions from here: identification and analysis of additional suburban downtown redevelopment case studies; development of community indicators to truly test the viability of Suisun City, Tualatin, and other redevelopment projects; and implementation of the methodology through a redeveloping suburban downtown. Each direction would result in refinements to the methodology.

Additional Case Studies

Though many accurate conclusions can be drawn from Suisun City and Tualatin--and are generally supported by the outcomes of other smaller redevelopment projects such as Mizner Park, The Village at Shirlington, and Uptown District--they still do not provide a large sample. Additional case studies should be identified, and then evaluated and subsequently used to refine the methodology.

Analysis of other large-scale suburban downtown redevelopment activities will answer several questions: Is the public developer role with small parcels for individual private developers truly the best approach? Can downtowns be

effectively redeveloped without public ownership of land? How do other communities alleviate barriers and effectively deal with the initial costs of redevelopment? What are the most prevalent properties of sustainable redevelopment used by redeveloping suburbs, and why aren't other properties as popular? How do other communities measure success? Indeed, other examples can provide a wealth of information.

Other redevelopment projects at the suburban downtown level are certainly out there, though ones that attempt to completely redevelop the area in a holistic manner that equitably preserves the built and natural environments, cultural heritages, and economic opportunities seem to be rare. The first half of the author's research efforts were largely devoted to identifying sustainable redevelopment case studies. On a suburban downtown level, only Suisun City and Tualatin Commons were found.

Yet redevelopment is likely to happen more and more as communities discover successful ways to overcome barriers, and learn that in the long term, the costs of redevelopment are much less than not redeveloping at all.

Two to four additional case studies will allow the author to firm up the methodology to make it even more useful to other suburban communities.

Comprehensive Evaluation of Case Studies

Though Suisun City and Tualatin were evaluated for overall success in achieving sustainable outcomes, the results are limited because the time frame for research has been relatively short, and data for thorough analysis is not available. In order to truly gauge the sustainability of these case studies--as well as additional ones added at a later time--community indicators should be developed for each.

Development, implementation, and evaluation of indicators of community sustainability are no small tasks, and must happen in conjunction with the community and its citizens. It makes sense for the indicators to address both overall issues or categories affecting the entire community, and opportunities and constraints affecting the redevelopment area itself.

Indicators will serve two purposes for the case studies. First, they will give city leaders, residents, and other stakeholders the opportunity to actually measure the progress of redevelopment efforts. Does the physical design of Suisun City's Victorian Harbor truly reduce automobile use and enhance pedestrian activity? Are auto emissions and congestion therefore reduced? Does Tualatin Commons's residential-office-restaurant-hotel mix enhance around-the-clock use of the city center? How successful

are the restaurants? What are the economic benefits to the city itself?

Second, indicators will allow cities to make changes to further enhance sustainability. Though city leaders can only guess about the success of redevelopment activities now, they will have hard data and keen recommendations for activities that are even more likely to be economically, environmentally, and socially successful once indicators are implemented. Perhaps funding should be more appropriately funneled into restoring historic structures and small business opportunities along Suisun City's Main Street? It may be that additional mass transit, pedestrian, and bicycle access is needed to bring more residents into Tualatin Commons.

Once a baseline for indicators is established, each community is set up for long-term evaluation. Though revisions will certainly be necessary, evaluating activities, recommending modifications, and making changes will be possible in a much more efficient and effective manner when a process is in place.

Testing the Methodology

Though the fourteen-step methodology proposed in this report is not a model, it should still be tested to find if the

recommendations are sound and the steps beneficial and/or necessary. The ideal candidate is a suburban community with a decaying downtown where residents and city leaders alike are eager to redevelop for a sustainable future.

Testing could be conducted on two levels. First, the community can utilize the fourteen properties of sustainable redevelopment to effect project design. Second, it can initiate redevelopment by following the fourteen steps of the suburban downtown redevelopment methodology. Fundamentally, the properties of sustainable redevelopment are integrated into the methodology's steps.

Specifically, the properties most directly affect Steps 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 12. They begin by positively influencing the suburb's recognition of a strong suburban core and development of a vision, goals, and specific plan. They are implemented in the physical design and site plan, through environmental review and design guidelines. Their success ultimately rests on the design team and individual developers, who take, for example, the

Suburban Downtown Redevelopment Methodology

- Step 1. Recognize the need for redevelopment by evaluating the values of a strong suburban core.
- Step 2. Develop a vision of the community itself and a redeveloped downtown specifically.
- Step 3. Develop a comprehensive community involvement approach.
- Step 4. Develop a set of community principles and goals for redevelopment, including community indicators.
- Step 5. Recognize responsibility as a public developer and act on that.
- Step 6. Develop a specific redevelopment plan.
- Step 7. Develop a comprehensive financing scheme.
- Step 8. Hire a quality design team.
- Step 9. Conduct an environmental review.
- Step 10. Develop stringent but workable design guidelines.
- Step 11. Develop a marketing plan.
- Step 12. Work with private developers in an efficient public-private partnership.
- Step 13. Develop and implement an evaluation mechanism.
- Step 14. Promote the redeveloped downtown as the place to be.

properties of transit orientation and “green” construction and design the redevelopment around them, constructing the physical structures and amenities to ensure the properties are successfully

attained.

Two questions must be asked when the methodology is tested: What happens when every step is followed? What works best, and consequently does not work well, about the methodology?

Testing the full methodology will not be an attempt to mandate that every step be used, but rather an analysis to determine which of the steps appear to be most appropriate. The community is of course unique, and steps may or may not be successful given the economic, environmental, cultural, and political climate. But if they are not successful, and even when they are, we need to know why.

Circumstances may vary widely among suburban communities in one metropolitan area, let alone across the entire country. A test by only one redeveloping suburb, therefore, will not be indicative of how the methodology can benefit another community. As more suburban downtowns redevelop by using the methodology, however, it can be revised.

It does not make sense, though, to attempt to make the methodology highly specific based on two or three tests. Its value is ultimately in its adaptability, and adoptability, by a wide range of suburbs. Specifying particular changes to individual steps

based on only a handful of suburbs could render it ineffective as a general methodology on the whole.

Finally, suburban leaders and citizens should keep in mind that the methodology is only an outline. It is not an inflexible mandate and should not be taken as such. When opportunities arise to change the methodology to increase potential for sustainability, they should be grasped. When steps do not appear to make sense for a suburb's particular redevelopment challenges despite a thorough review of their possibilities, they should be discarded.

Sustainable downtown redevelopment offers suburbs the opportunity to enhance economic, environmental, and social viability. The fourteen-step methodology proposed in this report offers them the chance to get it right.

Endnotes and References

1. Washington State Energy Office, Washington State Department of Transportation, Department of Ecology, and Energy Outreach Center. June 1996. *Redevelopment for Livable Communities*. Energy Outreach Center: Olympia, WA. Pg. 85.