Rethinking the Retail Strip
Transforming Old Uses to Meet New Needs

April 26, 2023
Why Strip Malls?

• **Ubiquitous.** The median total area of strip malls for each community is 71 acres

• **They’re often under-performing.** Our selection of commercial sites is valued at less than $2.7 million per acre vs. new mixed-use often assessed at $7.7 million per acre

• **Cloudy future.** E-Commerce, changing consumption preference, etc.

• **Potential for near-term change.** Smaller sites than other suburban forms can be redeveloped incrementally
The Scale of the Opportunity

Through our analysis, MAPC identified more than **3,000 sites**, covering nearly **14 square miles** of area.

* Sites identified using Retail Trade (Land Use Code “32”) combined with assumptions to identify auto-centric sites.

Approximately 13.7 square miles of the MAPC region is devoted to strip malls (box shows area comparison to Woburn).
Capacity Analysis

A critical component of the analysis was estimating the potential housing unit yield on each site. MAPC developed different parameters depending on the community and location within the community.

**Assumptions**
- Maximum floors
- SF/unit
- Res parking req.
- Comm parking req.
- % open space
- % setback area
- % commercial

**Diagram**

- Municipality
  - Station Area Type (if applicable)
  - Community Type
  - Along an Arterial (if applicable)
Suitability Analysis

Not all sites are created equal. The final component of analysis was to prioritize suitability. MAPC developed a weighted model to analyze sites best aimed at achieving regional goals in a sustainable manner.
Results of Analysis

If looking at just the top 10% of most highly suitable sites, the implications of redevelopment are huge:

- Number of new homes: **125,000** (mixed-use development)
- Number of affordable homes if produced as 40R: **25,000**
- Additional tax revenue: **$587 million**
- Emissions averted (compared to multifamily of greenfield sites): **400,000 metric tons of carbon emissions**
- Acres of new impervious surface averted (compared to multifamily of greenfield sites): **10 square miles**

MAPC’s analysis shows that **29% of the identified sites are within a half mile of transit** – sites that can help meet the requirements of Section 3A of the MBTA multifamily requirement.
Data Tools

Potential Retail Retrofit Sites in MAPC Region

Summary Statistics

3,028 Sites
8,750.0 Acres Sites Area
883 Sites Near MBTA Transit
$370,516 Average New Tax Revenue Per Site
125,095 Potential Units, top 10% of sites
$586,395,680 Potential New Tax Revenue, top 10% of sites

Legend

Site Score
- Most Favorable
- Very Favorable
- Favorable
- Less Favorable
- Least Favorable

Highlighted Site

Read the Report

http://rethinking-the-retail-strip.mapc.org
Data Tools

Potential Retail Retrofit Sites in

Marlborough

Summary Statistics
- 68 Sites
- 178 Acres Sites Area
- 0 Sites Near MBTA Transit
- $313,453 Average New Tax Revenue Per Site
- 2501 Potential Units, top 10% of sites
- $7,405,709 Potential New Tax Revenue, top 10% of sites

Site 8718

222 East Main St
Site 8933

http://rethinking-the-retail-strip.mapc.org
Data Tools

Potential Retail Retrofit Sites in

Marlborough

5 Parcels
15.36 Acres of Potentially Buildable Area
$2,335,500.00 Assessed Land Value
$13,191,300.00 Assessed Building Value
11.65 Acres of Estimated Paved Area
None within 0.5 Transit Station Area
Miles
No Municipal Sewer Nearby

Redevelopment Suitability and Potential

Over 500 Units of Potential Housing Capacity
Over $1 million Estimated New Tax Revenue
0.69/1 Growth Potential Score
0.75/1 Healthy Communities Score
0.87/1 Healthy Watersheds Score
0.64/1 Travel Choices Score
3.10/4 Overall Score
12th/68 Rank within Municipality

http://rethinking-the-retail-strip.mapc.org
Data Tools

http://rethinking-the-retail-strip.mapc.org
Data Tools

http://rethinking-the-retail-strip.mapc.org
Barriers

Local Barriers (i.e., zoning)
- Prohibited uses
- Overly restrictive dimensional requirements
- Excessive parking
- Discretionary process

Infrastructure Barriers
- Lack of water capacity
- Waste-water disposal

Landowner Barriers
- Individual owners, not professional developers
- Steady income stream
- Costly and complex development process
Principles

1. Plan holistically
2. Center equity
3. Prioritize walkability and alternative modes
4. Mitigate commercial displacement
5. Capture increased value
6. Provide predictability
Principles

1. Plan holistically
2. Center equity
3. Prioritize walkability and alternative modes
4. Mitigate commercial displacement
5. Capture increased value
6. Provide predictability
Principles

1. Plan holistically
2. Center equity
3. Prioritize walkability and alternative modes
4. Mitigate commercial displacement
5. Capture increased value
6. Provide predictability

88 of the 350 units are deed-restricted affordable at 80% AMI
Principles

1. Plan holistically
2. Center equity
3. Prioritize walkability and alternative modes
4. Mitigate commercial displacement
5. Capture increased value
6. Provide predictability
Principles

1. Plan holistically
2. Center equity
3. Prioritize walkability and alternative modes
4. Mitigate commercial displacement
5. Capture increased value
6. Provide predictability
Principles | Burlington Center Case Study
Parking is a predominant feature. No buffer between sidewalk and busy roadway. 4-lane roadway with no bicycle facilities. Small curb cuts help walkability. Single story buildings. Landscaping buffers parking from sidewalk. No buffer between sidewalk and busy roadway. Parking is predominant feature.
Principles | Burlington Center Case Study
Principles | Burlington Center Case Study

- Parking located in rear of building
- Front yard setback used for seating and other “active” uses
- Buffer area between roadway and sidewalk contains landscaping, pedestrian-scale lighting, and amenities
- “Road diet” uses center turning lane
- Road diet allows space for separated bicycle facilities
- High visibility crosswalks (continental or ladder style)
Principles | Burlington Center Case Study

Buildings are articulated vertically and horizontally with architectural details, change in materials, varied roof lines, etc. to add visual interest and avoid monotony.

Pedestrian access between buildings to parking

Large building broken down into multiple bays to “read” as multiple buildings

Ground floor contains high percentage of windows
1. Incorporate analysis into planning
2. Create a vision and plan
3. Adopt zoning
   • Allow residential into the mix
   • Incorporate affordability
   • Establish design guidance
   • Right-sized parking
   • By-right development
   • Consider 40R where appropriate
4. Promote small and local business
   • Limit chains
   • Subsidized commercial spaces
5. Enact TDM
6. Implement complete streets
7. Take advantage of state funding and grants
Many of the recommendations in MetroCommon 2050, especially the ones to facilitate more equitable transit-oriented development, are applicable to strip mall retrofits.

1. Strengthen 40R
2. Create a TOD land bank
3. Incentivize parking reforms
4. Allow regional mitigation funds
5. Update wastewater disposal regulations
Thank You!

http://rethinking-the-retail-strip.mapc.org

Chris Kuschel, AICP
Land Use Manager + Principal Planner
MAPC
ckuschel@mapc.org