



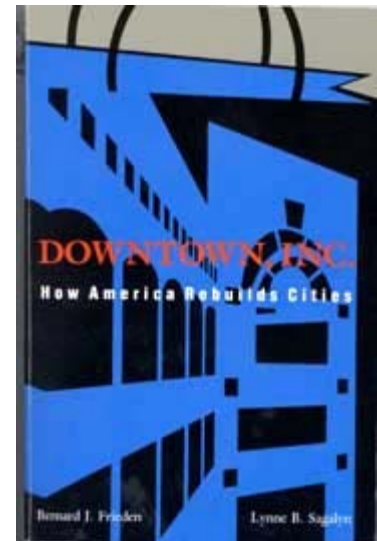
Making Cores Happen Right!

Preparing to Plan, Implement and Manage

Many issues and problems need to be resolved before pro-core objectives and strategies can be implemented widely, consistently, and well. Until they are, successful cores will be the exception rather than the rule for several reasons:

1. Even though the value and importance of downtowns and cores are almost universally recognized among students and practitioners of cities and urban form – and even in the development community – *the concept is not seriously embedded in the public mind or in public policies and programs.*

Although the concept was a major part of the background for massive federal programs of urban renewal and redevelopment forty years ago and was included in plans for a large number of urban regions, except for the now defunct Federal programs, *tools were rarely established to support implementation.* Few if any guidelines were established for core planning and design. Except where cores served as the centers of self-governing communities, little was done by governments to aid in their planning and building. As a result many proposed cores never developed and where they were, they often fail to meet guidelines and principles essential to success.



2. *Few developers are interested in, or have the skills or resources to provide for, the range of functions that are required to make potential mixed-use cores successful.*¹ They may specialize in *housing, retail, office or industrial* and are unable or unwilling to include other

¹When this was written several years ago, this statement was largely true. Since then scores of people involved in development – financing, design, building, and government – have become familiar with and committed to pursuing “mixed use development.” Still others focus on getting such development at the scale of complexes around transit stops or other attractive anchors. So this obstacle is rapidly becoming less critical. There is still a major need to move beyond and above the project scale to producing mixed use centers, cores, downtowns, and even villages. It is at these levels that the benefits of mixed-use development will be most effective in achieving the major goals and benefits of which it is capable.

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activities in their plans. Where developers are able and willing, they may not be able to obtain public participation or find financial organizations willing to participate. As a result, they may not be able to obtain the land and/or transportation needed to create a strong core.

Example: Six of Phoenix's seven original cores have had to be redeveloped to serve different functions. And two more in neighboring Scottsdale are going through redevelopment.

Developer limitations may result in "cores" that are largely single-use, with little or none of the compactness or synergy required for success. At the same time, most communities and institutions may also have little commitment or ability to provide necessary or desirable public or community space or facilities in cores in a timely way.

3. *Too few communities or developers understand the value of, or are adequately committed to, the principles required to plan and implement successful cores.* Even when these principles are followed initially, if they are not broadly understood and supported, they often succumb to changes in personnel, special interests, or other pressures over time.
4. *Authority and resources for planning and development of a core may be in the hands of organizations or individuals whose mandates, responsibilities or special interests do not match those of the core as a whole.* In such cases, authority and membership of the responsible organization should be adjusted so that it can and will more likely do what is required.

What are results of these deficiencies? The following are some of the most common.

- **Cores and service areas don't match:** The types, numbers of functions, and locations of many cores do not match their service areas. Cores are often too close together and not enough market is included in accessible or available areas to support the functions provided.
- **Cores are not compact:** Often they include 800–1000 acres, areas far larger than the downtowns of even the largest cities with only a fraction of the floor space and activity. The result is that they have far less concentration of building area or activity than is required to make them attractive, efficient or viable.
- **Many cores do not have a good mix of land uses:** Retail or office uses often dominate to such an extent that little space is devoted to housing, institutional or public functions or needed support land uses or services. Functions that duplicate key core functions often occupy land that should be used for complementary or supporting activities. And many are purely retail or office.
- **Internal movement as a pedestrian or transit rider is very difficult or impossible.**

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- **Access is not good, by car and especially by public transit:** Some locations are served by only one or two streets, and the majority do not have adequate transit access or good internal circulation.
- **Support functions, such as open space, cultural, public, educational or recreational facilities or housing, are non-existent or weak.**
- **Aside from interior spaces or scattered and unused open spaces, the number of amenities is low overall.**

Example: In 1910, the Commercial Club, sponsor of Burnham's work, recognized the need for continuity and education and hired Charles Wacker to serve as a publicist and promoter for the plan. He made this his career and left the plan and the concept of planning with such stature that it is being continued and followed after almost 100 years.

Of course, there are many successes, and we must look to those to find guides to improvement. Here are a few:

1. **Select good locations to help assure good results.** The locations of most good cores were chosen with knowledge of the importance of transportation and amenity. The advantages and attractions of Cincinnati, San Francisco, New York, Chicago, New Orleans, and many other port or water front cities often virtually dictate locations and provide great amenity. But freedoms afforded by the automobile and a lack of outstanding amenities make location decisions less obvious and make success more dependent on skilled planning and design. Even if good locations are selected, difficulty in dealing with the large number of variables can still lead to mediocrity or failure. This has been particularly true with hundreds of shopping centers established since auto access has been a primary factor in location and would probably be a factor when deciding which existing cores should be selected.
2. **Assure good planning to enhance good locations and to overcome weaknesses in those with fewer natural advantages.** Skill here includes having both an understanding of the principles to be followed and the ability and enthusiasm to convey this understanding and make it last. Sound principles were major features of plans prepared by Burnham in Chicago, Bacon in Philadelphia, and J. C. Nichols in Kansas. And in each case they and their sponsors provided the information, continuity and commitment to assure that they were carried out. In varying degrees this was done in many other cities by strong mayors, key business leaders or especially farsighted and effective developers and planners.

In some instances unique qualities of downtown sites and locations assured that important principles were not ignored. Compactness was assured in downtown Chicago by the configuration of rivers, lake and railroads surrounding its site. In San Francisco, Portland and Seattle water and other natural features also provided amenities that have grown in value over time and shaped their downtowns. But vision and perseverance were required to assure that natural advantages were protected and used to provide the

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amenity inherent in them and to do other things that maximize value. (See links to related material below and in linked pages.)

3. Plan at *several levels* to get the best possible results:

- a) *In planning and building whole systems of cores: Regional, State, Sub-state, Metropolitan, Corridor, transit system and City.* There have been limited efforts to plan and develop whole systems. A number of metropolitan areas and a few regions identified or proposed systems of cores largely based on historical settlements. Some of the best examples include the San Francisco Bay Region, Los Angeles, Minneapolis-St Paul, Baltimore and Toronto. In a few cases they developed proposals to perfect and extend this system, and in others public efforts were made to prescribe or assist in implementation. Most have been successful in the most basic respect that several, planned sub-regional, as well as many “unplanned”² cores have been developed. This is true because both public and private interests are served by building mixed-use cores. These interests often quickly diverge, however, over issues such as number, location, size, composition, amenities, standards and emphasis to be given to public or community versus individual private goals.

Vancouver, BC, Canada has followed a deliberate plan of linking land use to its public transportation system, seeking not only to strengthen its central downtown but a series of sub centers throughout the region. See <http://tinyurl.com/39u3fu> for more information.

Obviously, this is the level at which the widest range of interests and goals are encountered, often including multiple levels of government, property interests, developers and jurisdictions. It is at this level that it is most important that fundamental agreement be developed and understood regarding the need for cores and the different functions they should play and of the relative roles of public and private organizations and institutions. This agreement and understanding must be very strong if the concept of and commitment to cores is to survive and be implemented with vigor and integrity.

Because of differences in scale, it is likely that those who propose or plan regional systems may not be directly involved with implementation. The result is that there may be little connection between planners and implementers and that knowledge and enthusiasm about why systems of cores are important and how they can be built may not be found together, as they should be. However, the exception may occur in systems of smaller cores, such as those at community or neighborhood levels, which might be more readily managed. Coordination and implementation might be enhanced where planning is for, example, a system related to a transit or commuter rail system where requirements of the transportation facility may drive

²The term “unplanned” is used because often little or no thought is given to providing for a mix of uses beyond the specific “core” project.

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much of the planning agenda, where policies and implementation may be coordinated by a single city, county or region with necessary jurisdiction.

- b) *In coordinated development of whole, but individual, cores and centers.* While it may seem that many cores (e.g., shopping centers, office centers, school, medical centers) are being planned as a whole, the fact is that few are. Few have scale or features other than the anchor uses. Victor Gruen called them “unifunctional.” Secondary and supporting uses such as public open space, housing, recreation, cultural or other *support* or community features are seldom included. Planning of *whole* mixed-use cores usually occurs only with existing centers of existing cities and towns or of well planned *new* towns or communities. And even in these areas things that should be included in core planning are left out³.
- c) *In planning and construction of major parts or projects within cores.* This is where most planning associated with cores is done. Of course such planning is essential: cores have to be built part by part or project by project. But success at this level doesn't assure effective cores. No matter how *good* the individual projects are, if they don't help the success of the whole they could create a failure – both in itself and in terms of what it does to the success of the core as a whole. Where one or two interests dominate development of a core, overall principles and plans are often sacrificed to serve their specific needs. Common mistakes are to design projects in ways that destroy compactness, block streets or paths needed for vehicular or pedestrian movement, put parking or other facilities where they conflict with amenities or pedestrian activity and exclude important functions needed to provide the vitality of mixed-use.

So what is required for effective planning?

How do we get effective planning that will reflect sound principles, and sufficient memory and support for such principles to assure that they will be followed over time? Several things are required:

1. **Effective planning must focus on principles** – broad concepts to be observed in all plans and projects affecting individual cores or systems of cores. These principles require that individual cores have a compact and compatible mix of land uses, good access and internal circulation, good amenities, activities and images and supporting neighboring development. Planning for systems of cores must include close coordination with transportation (especially public transportation), provide for a hierarchy of cores ranging from neighborhood to region-wide and include cores anchored by activities other than retail and office functions.

³Conflicts can show up many years later as additional projects are undertaken within or near a core that split its markets, congest its access, destroy its compactness or otherwise cause principles to be compromised.

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2. **It is essential that a good understanding and a broad and long-range commitment to principles emerge from any preparation phase.** Understanding and commitment should be developed at several levels: First, among professionals who will be charged with planning and implementation in both the public and private sectors. Second, among organizations likely to be involved in financing and other support for core development. Third, among leaders, both public and private, who will make or control key decisions.

Professionals, organizations and leaders involved in planning should come from and represent all of the areas and interests to which policies and plans are expected to apply. This is especially true where policy, legal, financial or other support will be required from a wide range of governments or private interests.

3. **More broad legal, financial, policy and/or program support should be provided for cores by higher levels of government, including regional, metropolitan, state and nation.** The development of strong cores should be identified as a matter of major public interest at every level, with appropriate support in public policy, programs and legislation. Such support has been available in varying degrees in the past, especially in federal public transportation, redevelopment and renewal programs, to a lesser degree in the legislation and programs of some states and in those of metropolitan and regional governments. But experience has shown that much stronger and broader support is required to achieve really significant implementation of core concepts and principles.

For example, the support of states, counties and large cities has frequently been given only to dominant downtown(s) with little recognition, much less support, to the many other existing or potential cores in their jurisdiction or to the creation of new cores.

As the importance of cores at every level gains recognition, this deficiency is gradually being overcome and some public policies and support mechanisms are being developed to strengthen neighborhood and community cores. A number of private, non-profit business, cultural and professional organizations also recognize the importance of a wide range of cores and provide information and assistance to their proper development.

4. **The best experience of the past, as well as newly developed knowledge and techniques in the building of understanding, consensus and agreement among a broad range of interests, should be employed in the development of policies and plans.**

For more on this subject see:

Dittmar and Ohland ed., *The New Transit Town: Best Practices In Transit-Oriented Development*, Island Press 2003

Dunphy, Robert, et al, *Developing Around Transit, Strategies and Solutions That Work*, Washington D. C., ULI - Urban Land Institute, 2004.

Cervero, Robert, *The Transit Metropolis, A Global Inquiry*, Island Press, 1998.

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Some relevant experiences include Chicago, Minneapolis, San Diego, Toronto, Vancouver, Highland Park and Evanston (IL). These and others are referenced in "Sources and References" and in other linked pages.

Several organizations also provide excellent information dealing with experience, understanding and principles. Only a handful are strong enough to work across the board in developing as well as disseminating information. Two of the strongest are the Urban Land Institute (ULI) and the American Planning Association (APA). They have produced most of the best research and literature available on the values of strong mixed-use cores.

Major work by the Urban Land Institute includes such books as the *Downtown Development Handbook*, *Office Development Handbook*, *Joint Development*, and, just recently, *Transforming Suburban Shopping Centers*. ULI has also published numerous monographs and research and case studies on specific topics such as parking, new towns, malls and other topics of critical interest to anyone interested in improving cores. And both organizations distribute information through their websites as well as in conferences, bookstores, workshops and through technical teams.

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