

Congress  
for the  
New  
Urbanism

# GREYFIELDS INTO GOLDFIELDS

GREYFIELD MALL CHARACTERISTICS  
REVITALIZATION SUCCESS STORIES

*from failing shopping centers  
to great neighborhoods*

A STUDY BY CONGRESS FOR THE NEW URBANISM  
PRICewaterhouseCOOPERS  
AND LEE S. SOBEL

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# The goal, put simply, is to turn greyfields into goldfields.

## Greyfield Malls: A national problem

Obsolete shopping malls dot the American cityscape. Finding them doesn't require much expertise. Fenced-in parking areas are a dead give-away. Weekend used car sales give a strong hint. Storefronts converted into centers for community policing and health clinics are telling signs. Property owners, tenants and investors know about their decline. Neighbors, former shoppers, and erstwhile employees know. City managers and community leaders know. But just because they know the problem doesn't mean they know the solution.

The Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU) sees many of these shopping centers as ideal sites for transit-oriented, mixed-use development. Some of them are no longer suitable for regional retail. But many are well suited as the sites of new urbanist development that may include housing, retail, office, services, and public space.

Will Fleissig, a developer with Continuum Partners in Denver, is converting the greyfield Villa Italia mall in Lakewood, Colorado. Fleissig says, "We hear so much about infill, smart growth, first tier suburbs, transit-oriented development, and sprawl. If you look at the larger picture, this is the biggest issue facing America today. We need to build better neighborhoods in existing communities, near transit. These greyfield sites are the first wave of large landholdings that are in existing communities, near transit, with existing utilities and transportation systems, with potential for significant densification."

This report uses the term *greyfield malls* to describe retail properties that require significant public and private-sector intervention to stem decline. More familiar are brownfields (contaminated urban development sites) and greenfields (undeveloped rural land). By contrast, greyfields are developed sites that are economically and physically ripe for major redevelopment.

Absent successful revitalization efforts, the value of greyfield mall sites will be reduced to land value less the cost of building demolition. There are sites that have already reached that point, with harsh community and economic impacts, in every region of the country. For a local community, a greyfield is more than just visual blight. It means lost tax base, lost job opportunities, and valuable land sitting unused. The severity of such blight in one community was highlighted when the Boulder, Colorado *Daily Camera* proclaimed its "story of the year" for 2000: The decline of the city's Crossroads Mall.

Local efforts to revive vulnerable and dying retail sites are common. Some have been successful, others have not. CNU is conducting a national examination of how to revitalize these sites so they can again provide value to their communities and their owners. The goal, put simply, is to turn greyfields into goldfields.



Mizner Park, in Boca Raton, Florida, was once a greyfield mall. Today, it is a popular mixed-use neighborhood, combining offices, retail, residences, and public space.

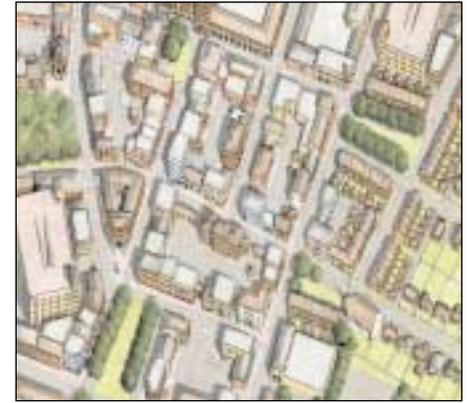
Cooper Carry



In 1997, before redevelopment, Eastgate Mall in Chatanooga, Tennessee was nearly empty. Parking lots surrounded a cloistered shopping center.



Today, the mall has turned inside-out to face the street. Plans call for a town square to replace part of the parking lot.



A generation of growth will eventually reclaim empty spaces with buildings and public places.

Dover Kohl & Partners

## The Study

CNU began studying greyfield malls in early 2000. The study has had several elements:

- The Graduate School of Design at Harvard University held a design studio, led by CNU member Will Fleissig and Professor Richard Peiser. The studio first designed conversions of actual greyfield malls, and then conducted economic feasibility analyses to determine whether new urbanism “penciled out.”
- PWC worked with CNU to examine the retail landscape. The PWC findings comprise the report, “Greyfield Regional Mall Study,” available from CNU or at <http://www.cnu.org/malls>.
- The International Council of Shopping Centers critiqued PWC’s work, leading to refinements in the study’s methodology.
- In February 2001, CNU member Lee Sobel, a Florida real estate professional, began compiling revitalization success stories for a project catalog. Preliminary results are included here.

The PWC study focuses on regional malls, and does not examine the many other types of retail properties that pose similar redevelopment challenges. CNU is focusing on regional malls because these sites — with at least 350,000 square feet of leasable space and a minimum of 35 store spaces — inflict particularly severe impacts when in decline, while at the same time offering unique opportunities for reuse.

## POTENTIAL REASONS FOR MALL DECLINE

*FROM PRICEWATERHOUSECOOPER’S GREYFIELD REGIONAL MALL STUDY*

- Changes in accessibility, infrastructure, and transportation corridors that effectively make older inner city and first-ring suburban malls less competitive.
- Changes in urban economics—shifts in population and capital, and attention to increasingly distant suburbs.
- Alterations in retail format over time—introduction of power centers and category killers.
- Competition from newly constructed centers within 3 to 5 miles.
- Changes in surrounding area household demographics—age of population, racial composition, household income.
- Changes in the level of tenant commitment—unwillingness to sign long-term leases, creation of encumbrances that make it difficult to redevelop the property.
- Poor facility management, lack of revenue to support necessary maintenance.
- Other forces such as anchor tenant bankruptcies or mergers, environmental stigma.
- Private owners may lack access to capital to invest in renovations and/or expansions.



Moule & Polyzoides

Plaza Pasadena was a regional mall that interrupted the traditional urban street grid of Pasadena, California. After years of decline, the mall was demolished in 2000. It is being replaced by Paseo Colorado, a traditional urban streetscape combining retail and residences.

## Characteristics of Greyfields

The characteristics of greyfield malls cited here are based on data analysis by PWC. (See full report for details.) PWC found that greyfields have an average site size just over 45 acres. Notably, these sites are both smaller and less connected to the regional transportation system than those housing the nation's best-performing malls, which average over 70 acres in size, with freeway visibility and direct ramp access. Many greyfields are located in established neighborhoods and shopping districts. Will Fleissig, a developer who recently converted a Colorado greyfield into a mixed-use town center, says, "These malls tend to be on suburban arterials with bus service. Many are already bus hubs."

PWC found that mall obsolescence is associated with formidable competition. On average, greyfield malls have 2.3 million square feet of competing retail space in 22 other centers (including neighborhood and community centers and other regional malls) within five miles. Many are in trade areas dominated by newer retail formats and higher-end retailers. They are often older and smaller than the most successful malls in their region.

Mark Eppli, a retail researcher at George Washington University in Washington, DC, says that conventional renovations will not be sufficient to breathe new life into many properties. "A face-lift isn't going to do much to help. A new anchor store, depending on the center's position in the market, may not do much either."

New models for reuse are needed — models that go beyond face-lifts and conventional regional retail.

## New Urbanism for Greyfields

### *Failed mall sites are helping reverse urban sprawl*

Shopping malls epitomize the car-dominated landscape. Stores surrounded by parking, rather than neighborhoods, were inconceivable before automobile use became widespread. Now, these sites that helped spawn car culture are coming full-circle, offering unique opportunities to reverse urban sprawl by creating real neighborhoods amidst spread-out suburbs and gap-toothed cities.

Greyfields are among America's best opportunities for developing transit-oriented infill neighborhoods. Unlike typical suburban development, new urbanist neighborhoods are flexible enough to provide for many community needs. They can include mixed-income housing, jobs, retail, and public space, and other activities essential to a high quality of life.

**Big enough sites.** Many development sites in existing cities and towns are too small to justify the increased costs and risks of infill development. They are also too small to accommodate development projects of sufficient scale to offer real community benefits. Larger properties such as greyfield mall sites spread site development costs and enable projects that embrace the full range of new urbanist principles.

**Transit accessibility.** Civic leaders and neighbors are interested in the development of transit-oriented communities that include housing, stores, jobs, and schools. Many greyfields are on transit lines, and some even have existing bus hubs on site. More fundamentally, the development of new activity centers on greyfield sites concentrates origins and destinations built at densities high enough to support transit service.

**Mixed-income housing.** Housing affordability is a major problem in many metropolitan areas. However, developing higher density mixed-income housing in existing neighborhoods is often difficult, as neighbors resist projects and sites are usually too small for significant construction. Greyfield sites are large enough to accommodate a neighborhood built from the ground up — providing an opportunity to develop quality mixed-income housing that benefits its surroundings.

**Civic space.** Accommodating, attractive public space is sadly missing from many suburbs. New urbanist development provides public space for those important times when people are neither at home nor at work. These spaces help give new urbanism its reputation as "the architecture of community."



Federal Realty Investment Trust

Town & Country Mall in San Jose, California, was all but abandoned (left) before Federal Realty Investment Trust began rebuilding it as Santana Row, a mixed-use town center. When completed (right), it will add much-needed housing and open space to central San Jose. The county is planning a light rail stop at the site.

## Models for Reuse

While typical greyfield malls may be inadequate by current shopping center industry standards, they generally offer the acreage needed to create unified development projects implementing new urbanist principles. As mall sites, these properties might suffer from being too far off the freeways. But such locations may be advantages for new urbanist reuse. They offer the possibility of integrating site activities into neighborhood contexts.

Victor Dover, an architect who has worked on several new urbanist revitalizations of greyfield sites, says that new urbanism is often the best solution. “Sometimes a mall goes out of business because it has lost its economic reason for being. But almost every community needs something. Stop thinking about these as failed shopping center properties and start thinking about them as potential mixed-use properties.”

Forward-looking communities with greyfields are creating and testing new models for reuse. These models will be sorely needed, as mall failure is a growing trend — PWC identifies over 200 malls as vulnerable to becoming greyfields. While many well managed older malls are thriving, others will not escape obsolescence. Greyfields will be a perpetual problem associated with the contemporary practice of retail mall development. As each new retail trend emerges, and the standards for new sites again get “upgraded,” vulnerable sites are pushed into decline. Successful renovation of one mall may cause the decline of multiple older sites within a trade area.

Mall owners have come up with many techniques for reviving the financial performance of their properties. Most malls simply expand, redecorate, or attract a new anchor. Some malls have been converted to back

offices or data centers. In such cases, host communities lose what civic function the mall once provided. Most importantly, neither expansion nor office conversion results in the site providing the combination of housing, retail, office, and public space that citizens and civic leaders desire.

*The death of a mall does not have to be bad news. Careful redevelopment can be the recipe for an economic rebound.*

### Principles for creating new urbanist neighborhoods include:

- Reorient activity on the site to face the street.
- Reestablish a street pattern that connects with the streets of the surrounding community.
- Use site planning and architectural elements to make the redeveloped mall site fully a part of its community.
- Integrate multiple uses (ideally including employment and/or housing) on the site.
- Emphasize public space for shared activity.
- Provide a range of housing types, to provide homes for people of all ages and incomes.

These principles of new urbanism offer the chance for greyfield sites to provide enduring economic and social values to their host communities.

# REVITALIZATION SUCCESS STORIES

New urbanist projects on the sites of obsolete retail properties are not the stuff of science fiction—they are succeeding now. CNU is preparing a catalog of greyfield revitalization projects to demonstrate the success of these projects and to provide information to those looking for solutions to greyfield problems. The full catalog will be available in October. Preliminary findings and data from selected projects are included here.



## New Urbanist Revitalization Projects:

- 1 BelMar, Colo.
- 2 Eastgate Town Center, Tenn.
- 3 CityPlace, Calif.
- 4 The Crossings, Calif.
- 5 CityCenter, Colo.
- 6 Mizner Park, Fla.
- 7 New Roc City, N. Y.
- 8 Paseo Colorado, Calif.
- 9 Phelan Village Center, Minn.
- 10 Renaissance Town Center, Utah
- 11 Santana Row, Calif.
- 12 Town Center at Greendale, Wisc.
- 13 Winter Park Village, Fla.

## Project Selection

Thirteen new urbanist projects on greyfield retail sites will be included in the catalog (see map above for names and locations). All meet the following three criteria:

1. **Implementation is assured: The project is built, under construction, approved, or has construction financing**
2. **The project is on the site of a greyfield shopping center with at least 350,000 square feet of improvements, and**
3. **The project incorporates a number of the design elements listed on the prior page as “principles for creating new urbanist neighborhoods.”**

Data on six of the projects are summarized here. Full descriptions of all 13 projects will be in the catalog.

## CATALOG PREVIEWS

### 1 **BelMar** *Lakewood, Colorado*

Demolition of the Villa Italia Mall, where tenants now occupy only 30% of 1.4 million square feet of retail space, is scheduled to begin in July 2001. The new project, called Belmar, will introduce a mix of uses, continue the street network from the surrounding neighborhood and link to civic and cultural areas adjoining the site.

**Developer:** Continuum Partners LLC

**Master Architect Planner:** Elkus/Manfredi Architects, Ltd.

**Landscape Architect:** Civitas

**Residential Architect:** Van Meter Williams Pollack

### 7 **New Roc City** *New Rochelle, New York*

Demolition of the 625,000 square foot New Rochelle Mall was completed in 1997. New Roc will provide the downtown community with 1.2 million square feet of retail, restaurant and entertainment. The project is integrated with the existing urban street pattern.

**Developer:** Street-Works

**Architect:** PEG/Park Architect

# GREYFIELD REVITALIZATION PROJECT DATA

PROJECT	SITE ACRES	RETAIL SF	OFFICE SF	HOUSING	PARKING	OTHER
Belmar <i>Lakewood, CO</i>	100	800,000	800,000	1,300 apartments	200 for-sale units (6,500) Surface (1,500)	Garage
New Roc City <i>New Rochelle, NY</i>	15*	1.2 million	125,000	No housing	Garage	Entertainment and hotel
CityCenter <i>Englewood, CO</i>	55	339,000	25,000	450 apartments	Garage serves retail, civic & transit uses, some surface	New city hall
CityPlace <i>Long Beach, CA</i>	12*	478,000	None	358 apartments 70 loft condominiums	Three garages and surface	120-room hotel
The Crossings <i>Mountain View, CA</i>	18*	5,000	N/A	630 for-sale units Single Family/Townhouses	On-street/surface/ residential garages	Parks, tot lots, community bandstand
Mizner Park <i>Boca Raton, FL</i>	28	236,000	260,000	272 rental units	Garage plus on street and surface	Museums, amphitheater, Plaza

\*Smaller sites are in highly urbanized environments. CityPlace's 12 acres, for example, is the equivalent of eight Long Beach blocks. Data for all 13 revitalization projects will be included in the catalog to be published by CNU in Fall 2001.

## 5 CityCenter *Englewood, Colorado*

CityCenter is a mixed-use transit oriented development with retail, office and apartments. In March of 1968, Cinderella City Mall opened on the site with 275 shops—the largest mall west of the Mississippi. In 1974, the mall contributed 52% of Englewood's sales tax. A decade later, many tenants had relocated, and in 1997, the last tenant, Montgomery Ward, vacated the property, ownership reverted to the city, and the mall was boarded up.

**Developer:** Miller Weingarten Realty, a joint venture between Miller Development of Denver and Weingarten Realty Investors, a Houston-based REIT.

**Planner:** Calthorpe Associates

**Architects:** David Owen Tryba Architects and MCG Architects

**Residential Developer:** Trammell Crow Residential

## 3 CityPlace *Long Beach, California*

Long Beach has gained renown after emerging as the most ethnically diverse American city in the 2000 Census. In this densely populated, highly urbanized environment, CityPlace provides needed housing and retail space on the site of the former Long Beach Plaza, with urban design and transit features integrated into the surrounding neighborhood.

**Developer:** Developers Diversified Realty Corporation

**Architect:** Jerde Partnership



## 4 Crossings at *Mountain View, California*

The Crossings is a mixed-income neighborhood built on the

site of a 1950s shopping mall. In a market area saturated with retail properties and strained by recent job growth, housing demand is great. The project uses vernacular style and offers a variety of housing types with 85% of the units sold at market rate and 15% reserved for low to moderate income households.

**Developer:** The Plymouth Group

**Planner and Architect:** Calthorpe Associates

**Residential Developer:** Sidle Holtzman

## 6 Mizner Park *Boca Raton, Florida*

On the site of the old Boca Raton Mall, a 430,000-square foot enclosed shopping center. Mizner Park mixes uses horizontally and vertically, incorporating lush native landscaping and providing transit, auto, and pedestrian access. Project streets continue into the existing neighborhood street grid.

**Developer:** Crocker & Company, TIAA-CREF

**Planner and Architect:** Cooper Carry & Associates



Chuck Bohil

Participants sketch ideas at a charrette for the South Square Mall in Durham, North Carolina. The mall is threatened by a new shopping center nearby; local residents are helping envision a new future for the site.



Federal Realty Investment Trust

Town & Country Mall becomes Santana Row: What was a dreary, outdated shopping center will soon become a vibrant mixed-use neighborhood.

## Preliminary Findings

- The owner of the troubled or failed mall is in most cases not part of the redevelopment team
- The local municipality is typically the catalyst for mixed-use redevelopment of the site
- The master redeveloper is usually a joint venture composed of a local developer and a national or institutional partner
- Most of the projects introduce mixed uses including retail, office, and housing. Many projects combine rental and ownership housing with rental predominating. Hotels, civic uses, and public open spaces are common project elements.
- A number of the projects have or will have direct access to rail transit. These include CityCenter, The Crossings, CityPlace, and New Roc City. Others have scheduled bus service and/or shuttle service connecting the project site with nearby destinations.
- Many greyfield projects are anchored by grocery and big box retailers with stores placed on a newly re-established street grid. In most cases, these large tenants have a parking field up front with the potential for liner buildings to be added later with a corresponding increase in structure parking.

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*CNU's complete catalog of greyfield success stories will be available Fall 2001.*

CNU's Greyfield Mall research is supported through the generosity of the Surdna Foundation.

"Revitalization Success Stories" were compiled by CNU's contractors and staff based on information provided by people working in many agencies, firms, and organizations. We are very grateful for their assistance.

### FOR INFORMATION:

#### Congress for the New Urbanism

The Hearst Building  
5 Third Street, Suite 725  
San Francisco, CA 94103  
Phone: 415/495-2255  
Fax: 415/495-1731  
cnuinfo@cnu.org  
www.cnu.org

Front cover: Dover, Kohl & Partners' plan for the transformation of Winter Park Mall in Winter Park, Florida. Courtesy of Dover, Kohl & Partners.