
Chapter 10

RETAIL ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

As stated earlier in this report, the patterns of retail development in Northeast Ohio have been shaped through a combination of private sector market forces and public sector actions undertaken by federal and state agencies and local governments. The retail industry has always been adept at responding to demographic changes, and technological innovations will improve their ability to monitor these changes even more closely in the future. The purpose of this report is to assist local communities in understanding the ramifications of these trends with respect to the economy and quality of life in the region.

As a result of the continuing efforts of local communities to increase non-residential tax revenues, retail development is often encouraged because it provides employment opportunities, generates significant tax revenues and serves as a venue for local residents to purchase goods and services. It is therefore understandable why many communities have provided inducements to developers to attract this type of development.

Unfortunately, most new retail complexes do not conform to the principles of sustainability which are critical to the success of the smart growth movement. Sprawling retail development results in massive energy consumption, generates stormwater runoff which impacts downstream areas and disrupts established neighborhood retail districts by providing direct competition for their stores. Retail sprawl is fueled by a number of factors, including accelerated tax depreciation, excessive retail zoned land, high commercial property values, outmigration, and public decisions to extend or improve infrastructure in undeveloped areas.

It is apparent that not all 211 communities which comprise this study area have the same priorities with respect to retail development. While newer communities often try to establish a strong retail base by encouraging new strip malls and power centers, many older cities are striving to maintain and strengthen established retail districts. It is important for all communities to understand the dynamics of retail, particularly as it relates to shopping goods. In a region of very limited population growth, any major new retail development will have a negative impact on existing retail centers. Since most of the major retail projects proposed for the region are outside core areas, established areas in mature communities could continue to lose market share in the coming years. Public subsidies in the form of transportation and infrastructure improvements only exacerbate this situation.

The following section outlines issues concerning retail development in Northeast Ohio and suggests a number of potential strategies to deal with those issues.

IMPLICATIONS OF MAJOR RETAIL PROJECTS

Issue 1: Regional Impacts vs. Local Decision-Making

A large retail project can have significant impacts which extend beyond the local jurisdiction in which it will be located. While the host community and its school district will reap the economic benefits of retail development, adjoining communities often are affected by additional congestion, excess stormwater runoff, increased air emissions from more vehicles and competition for their retail districts. No mechanism currently exists for comprehensive regional review of such projects (Figure 10.1).



Figure 10.1. *As a result of their large size, many new retail developments can have significant regional impacts.*

Although some metropolitan areas in the United States do provide for regional review, and in some cases approval of major development projects, it is unlikely that such an effort would be successful in the State of Ohio. As a strong home rule state, Ohio gives local municipalities control over land use decisions. However, certain aspects of project impacts, such as those related to traffic generation, air and water quality, are carefully reviewed by one of the two metropolitan planning organiza-

tions (NOACA and AMATS). In addition, by 2003, the U.S.E.P.A., through its National Pollution Discharge Elimination System Phase II Stormwater Program, will require permits for municipal stormwater systems and regulated construction sites. This program is intended to reduce the adverse impacts of unregulated sources of stormwater discharges.

Strategy 1A

While regional approval of land use decisions is not authorized in the State of Ohio, it is important that local communities understand the “true costs” of a major retail development before they make a decision which can significantly impact surrounding communities. The models illustrated in Chapter 7 of this report were developed towards this goal. Communities wishing to apply the models to retail proposals may contact the Cuyahoga County Planning Commission for assistance.

Strategy 1B

Communities sharing the same watershed may wish to undertake a case study to determine the true impacts of a major retail development.

Strategy 1C

Carefully assess the impact of widening major retail arterials to alleviate traffic congestion. Such actions are extremely detrimental to maintaining a “main street” atmosphere.

Issue 2: Consumption of Large Parcels vs. Other Needs

Large tracts of privately owned land, particularly those located in the midst of developed areas, have been targeted for retail development.

Since the size of retail complexes continues to increase, finding suitable vacant sites in largely developed areas is difficult. Consequently, golf courses, driving ranges and other privately held recreation areas, as

well as land comprised of steep slopes or wetlands, have been the focus of recent retail development proposals (*Figure 10.2*).

Strategy 2A

An inventory of these types of properties in the seven-county area should be undertaken. Communities concerned about the potential transformation of these sites to retail use should carefully evaluate the appropriate zoning for such parcels should they be sold for development purposes. If the community's desire is to preserve the site as open space, an agent such as the Trust for Public Land should be contacted to provide assistance until funding to purchase the property outright is secured.

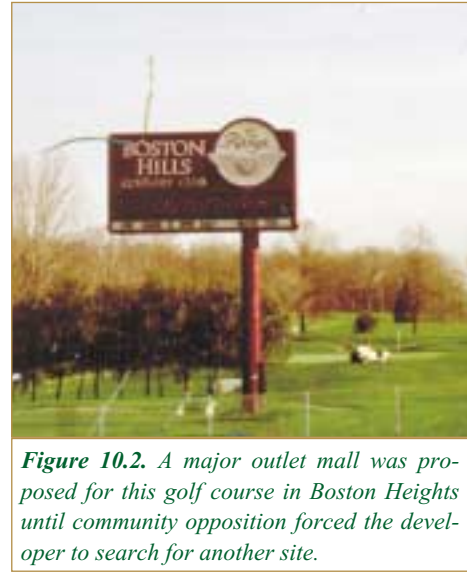


Figure 10.2. A major outlet mall was proposed for this golf course in Boston Heights until community opposition forced the developer to search for another site.

Issue 3: Competition for Public Incentives

The desire of communities to receive the economic benefits of a major development project has often led to a bidding war in the form of who can provide a better package with respect to tax inducements and infrastructure enhancements.

This scenario hurts the competitiveness of the region in that private investment is reduced at the expense of limited public resources.

Strategy 3A

State legislators and local officials need to discuss potential alternatives by which competing communities can share in both the costs and benefits of major development projects. State land use regulatory procedures need to be examined in this regard, and the political will to implement potential changes must be secured.

Issue 4: “Cocooning” of Sites from Competitors

There have been a number of instances where large companies have closed old and outdated stores and opened new ones a short distance away, but will not sell or lease the old building for fear it will be used by a competitor. This “cocooning” of buildings and sites depresses local land use.

While this policy may benefit these companies in protecting market share, it can prove to be very costly for a community in that it eliminates a tax generating tenant, creates a blighted appearance and decreases property values in the surrounding area.

Strategy 4A

While there is no legal mechanism which can force a property owner to sell or lease a building to a competing interest or, if it is paying rent to a shopping center, to allow the center management to cancel the lease, organized citizen and local government pressure can help to influence corporate officials to understand the importance of finding an appropriate tenant for the vacated space. In addition, communities need to strictly enforce building codes to ensure that the vacant property is properly maintained until the property is sold or leased to another tenant.

LAND USE AND ZONING

Issue 5: Community Assessment of Retail Needs

Communities need to assess the locations and amounts of retail space they need to serve the existing and future residents of the community.

As noted earlier, residents do not demonstrate unbridled loyalty to a community or a store when they choose a location to shop. In today's mobile society, people can and will drive to more distant locations if they perceive that they will benefit from lower prices, product selection and availability of merchandise. Therefore, local officials must decide on the type and location of retail activities they wish to provide:

- ✓ convenience oriented products and services (known as local retail);
- ✓ shopping goods and services (known as general retail);
- ✓ accessibility-oriented retail (which draws from a larger region).

Strategy 5A

In order to achieve a good balance between residential preferences and retail mix, communities should have an updated comprehensive plan which reflects the values and goals of the community. The goals serve as a framework to which policy makers must adhere when making future land use decisions. Thus, if goals such as promoting existing business districts and encouraging local retail are part of the plan, then decision makers should act accordingly when considering proposals.

Strategy 5B

Identify opportunities to create a "town center" or "main street" atmosphere as opposed to auto-oriented districts.

Issue 6: New Retail in Support of Existing Retail

There is a need to encourage retail development which complements existing retail districts.

In many cases, new retail development has been located away from the community's main retail area because land is more readily available and is less expensive.

Strategy 6A

Encourage national chains to locate in older retail districts (i.e., main streets) as opposed to locations which draw potential customers away from these areas (Figure 10.3). It is important, however, to retain local businesses whenever possible to maintain the district's uniqueness.



Figure 10.3. In many areas of Cleveland and its older suburbs, new retail projects have stimulated additional neighborhood investment.

Strategy 6B

Identify functionally obsolete industrial/retail sites and establish a land bank program which can assist developers in securing sites large enough to utilize in older, densely developed areas.

Strategy 6C

Avoid the use of public subsidies in the form of infrastructure assistance for retail projects which provide direct competition for existing retail districts.

Strategy 6D

Conduct a retail market analysis for the existing retail districts to determine retail uses which would complement established businesses and promote clustering of such establishments.

Issue 7: Using Land Use Regulation for Retail

Communities should carefully assess development proposals which require legislative actions such as rezoning.

While developers must follow local zoning and building codes for proposals to be located in appropriately zoned districts, legislative action is needed if the proposal is targeted for land zoned for another use. This may include zoning approval by the voters if referendum zoning is in place. Communities need guidelines to assist them in determining when rezoning is appropriate.

Strategy 7A

Impose a moratorium on rezoning actions until a comprehensive plan update is completed.

Strategy 7B

Identify areas within the community which are anticipated to receive pressure for rezoning to retail use and examine the implications of such a change during the formulation of the comprehensive plan. While the adoption of a plan will not guarantee success in fighting developer attempts to rezone land for retail use, courts are receptive to communities which proactively assess land use alternatives.

Strategy 7C

Require an impact analysis to assess impacts on traffic, employment, tax generation, city services, land use compatibility, infrastructure, stormwater run-off, parking and the environment. Such an assessment must involve regional infrastructure agencies such as NOACA, the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District, the City of Cleveland Water Department, the County Engineer, and the Sanitary Engineering Departments.

Issue 8: Outdated Retail Strips



Figure 10.4. *Many retail strips extend for miles through a number of communities.*

Many retail districts extend for miles through a number of communities, and marginal businesses have taken the place of original tenants who have left for more profitable locations (Figure 10.4).

When zoning maps were drawn up by local officials several decades ago, it was common to zone the entire length of major arterials for retail use. As the community filled up with residential subdivisions, retail uses along these corridors developed to support the new residents. Since most of these older communities have seen significant population losses over the past

twenty years, the residential density needed to support so many convenience type businesses no longer exists. Hence, many of these stores have become vacant or occupied by contractors and retail services.

Strategy 8A

It is more important for communities to focus on clustering businesses around major intersections than continuing the pattern of spreading out along long stretches of highway. This can be achieved

through zoning incentives (such as density bonuses) or infrastructure investments around major retail nodes.

Strategy 8B

In communities which are already served by an abundance of retail, serious consideration should be given to rezoning vacant retail property to another use or a zoning district which permits more flexibility with regard to permitted uses.

Strategy 8C

Mixed use development, which is not permitted by right in many communities, should be encouraged along major arterials. Townhouses, small office buildings and apartments above stores not only increase the economic health of retail strips, but provide potential customers for adjoining businesses; however, it is important that the retail component of a mixed use project be of an appropriate proportion so as not to overwhelm the other uses.

Issue 9: Meeting the Retail Needs of Exurban Areas

Residents in outlying areas of the seven-county region must drive considerable distances to purchase a variety of goods and services. They put pressure on local officials to supply the area with “necessary” retail. Everyone reasons that more retail development will help build a tax base to provide needed services to newer residents.

As residents of more densely developed areas migrate to outlying areas, they often miss the convenience of having shopping opportunities nearby. Consequently, long drives to retail districts in more established communities can take up valuable time and increase driving costs. Retail businesses are often welcomed in these areas.

Strategy 9A

Since retailers closely follow demographic characteristics such as population density and income levels, new developments are often introduced once a density threshold is reached. Sites near freeway interchanges or at major intersections are often purchased as speculative ventures until the appropriate time for development is reached. It is important that these outlying communities carefully plan locations for future retail stores so that haphazard development does not occur. This can be achieved through appropriate zoning techniques and targeting scarce funding for infrastructure projects to these desired areas. Rezoning commercial land which could result in uncontrolled strip development to a less intensive use should also be considered to discourage retail sprawl.

Issue 10: Big Box Stores

Many communities are concerned about the proliferation of big box stores and their impact on existing businesses.

The impacts of big box stores, both positive and negative, were discussed in Chapters 4 and 7. Unless federal tax disincentives for large developments are introduced, decisions with regard to their approval will continue to be made at the local level.

Strategy 10A

Several communities have imposed a maximum size restriction on new stores overall and even tighter restrictions in areas currently comprised of small stores. A size cap of 50,000 square feet would discourage large retailers but must be consistent with community goals. Placing a limit on the size of stores can also result in easier adaptive re-use of the building should the store close.

Strategy 10B

Communities may impose design standards which can regulate the appearance and design of all retail buildings, including big box stores.

Strategy 10C

National retailers should be encouraged by local jurisdictions to locate in existing downtown areas, preferably in vacant buildings. While this does not allow large companies the benefit of their prototype stores, it does allow them to fit in more appropriately with existing businesses. Requesting rezoning to clear residential properties for a new store when existing vacant stores are available often draws the ire of local residents.

Strategy 10D

Once a big box store is closed, communities should immediately assess potential reuse options for the site, including non-retail alternatives. Nationally, big box stores have been converted to call centers, offices and even elementary schools, while others have been demolished to allow for complete site re-development.

PARKING

Issue 11: Parking in Older Retail Areas

There is too little parking in many older retail districts.

Since many retail districts date back before the automobile was the preferred mode of travel, parking is usually at a premium. While communities have dealt with this issue in a variety of ways, there is no easy solution which is comprehensive in nature.

Strategy 11A

Communities should monitor the actual utilization of these parking areas. A simple study which tracks how many spaces are occupied at different times of the day can go a long way to dispelling perception of inadequacies and document specific areas of concern.

Strategy 11B

If a utilization study indicates that additional parking is required, carefully assess costly options such as land acquisition or parking garage construction. Explore mass transit options such as circulator busses to link neighborhoods with retail districts.

Strategy 11C

Designate specific areas for employee parking. Employees of retail stores should not be parking in spaces likely to be used by potential customers. If employees continue to occupy valuable on-street spaces, consider “zone” parking time limits which would ticket offenders who exceed allotted time limits in specific zones.

Strategy 11D

If meters are used, allow 30 to 60 minutes of “free time” to allow for convenience-type purchases. Expensive parking drives potential customers to seek other venues which provide free parking (Figure 10.5).



Figure 10.5. *Diagonal parking in older commercial districts such as Chardon also serves as a buffer between the sidewalk and street.*



Figure 10.6. Shared parking requires the cooperation of merchants and adjacent property owners.

Strategy 11E

Implement shared parking agreements between retailers and ancillary uses such as churches, local offices and institutions nearby (Figure 10.6). Quite often, peak hours of operation of stores and other uses differ enough to allow this policy to be effective.

Issue 12: Parking for Large Developments

There is so much parking at some big box and major retail locations that it appears to be excessive, resulting in stormwater run-off problems.

The typical one space per 200 square feet of retail required by many community zoning codes and desired by many retailers may indeed be excessive. A recent Urban Land Institute report found that over half of the available parking spaces in many shopping centers are unoccupied 40% of the year.¹ Local surveys have found similar incidences of significant underutilization. Yet, most shopping center owners are reluctant to give up even one space for fear that a potential customer may be lost to insufficient parking.

Strategy 12A

A 1999 study by the International Council of Shopping Centers found that parking supply exceeds demand by one space per 1,000 square feet for most shopping centers (under 600,000 square feet)²; therefore, a reduction to one space per 250 square feet would be justified in many instances. Preserving a mature tree stand in lieu of creating a few extra parking spaces thus makes both economic and ecological sense. Excess parking areas could also be converted to greenspace.

Strategy 12B

In retail areas served by public transit, communities should consider the establishment of maximum parking standards.

Strategy 12C

Monitor and enforce appropriate utilization of handicapped parking spaces.

Issue 13: Screening Parking from View

Many older communities have rear yard parking in their retail districts, but customers are reluctant to use them.

The rear entrances of many retail stores are poorly lit and unattractive. Customers who must walk by trash dumpsters and outdoor storage areas are unlikely to enjoy their shopping experience and may not return.

Strategy 13A

Better directional signage advising consumers of rear parking areas should be installed at appropriate locations (Figure 10.7).

Strategy 13B

Improving rear store entrances with better lighting, canopies and attractive signage is important. Trash containers and/or surplus materials should be screened from public view (Figure 10.8).

Issue 14: Making Parking Lots Pedestrian- Friendly

Parking lots in many areas are large, unattractive and pedestrian unfriendly.

Many zoning codes developed in the 1950's and 1960's did not require screening and buffering for parking lots unless they directly abutted residential districts.

Strategy 14A

Using the data in this report, consider reducing the amount of parking required for large stores.

Strategy 14B

Discourage massive front yard parking areas which severely degrade visual quality and encourage more side yard and rear yard options (Figure 10.9).



Figure 10.7. Directional signage is important when rear yard parking is available.



Figure 10.8. Unattractive rear store entrances should be upgraded similar to the bottom photo to make patrons more willing to park behind the building.



Figure 10.9. Breaking up large expanses of parking with landscaped islands can greatly improve the lot's appearance.



Figure 10.10. Many communities require landscaped setbacks to better define their parking areas.

Strategy 14C

Prohibit buildings from being torn down at mid-block to develop a parking lot. Such spaces disrupt the continuity at the block face and discourage pedestrian movement.

Strategy 14D

Establish zoning code standards which break up large expanses of parking lots with landscaped islands, which would be maintained by the store owner or shopping center manager.

Strategy 14E

Require parking lot setbacks of 5 or 10 feet with appropriate landscaping (Figure 10.10).

Strategy 14F

Work with shopping center and store owners to define and mark safe pedestrian passageways through parking lots which would link the establishments with sidewalks or other stores (Figure 10.11).

Strategy 14G

Incorporate best management practices such as filter strips, grass swales and vegetated detention basins to slow runoff, reduce pollutants and improve aesthetic appearance.

TRANSPORTATION

Issue 15: Traffic Congestion

Significant traffic congestion continues to occur around many retail clusters throughout the

seven-county region, especially on weekends and during the holiday season.

Retail stores generate more traffic than any other type of land use. Since many malls and power centers and their ancillary retail uses have located near interchanges of interstate highways, traffic on major arterials which feed the interstates has become a major problem for local communities.



Figure 10.11. *Attractive passageways between rear parking areas and the main street should be encouraged.*

Strategy 15A

Prior to any new retail development approval, it is important to require a traffic impact study conducted by an independent traffic engineer. Computer simulation models developed by the two local metropolitan planning organizations should also be utilized to determine how the level of service on existing arterials will be affected. The traffic engineer should be instructed to confer with the appropriate metropolitan planning organization (NOACA or AMATS) regarding trip generation rates to be utilized in the traffic analysis, as well as the use of the metro agency's computerized simulation models to determine how the level of service on existing arterials will be affected.

Strategy 15B

Encourage new retail businesses to locate in existing retail districts, particularly those which are pedestrian friendly and are served by public transit.

Strategy 15C

In undeveloped areas, discourage retail strip development through appropriate zoning techniques.

Strategy 15D

Require adherence to local metropolitan planning organization statements of principles to maximize scarce infrastructure resources and restrict retail sprawl.

Strategy 15E

In areas of severe congestion, explore the feasibility of constructing marginal roads which would eliminate numerous individual driveways having direct access to the main highway.

Strategy 15F

Work with developers to provide pedestrian and bicycle linkages with adjoining neighborhoods.

Issue 16: Post-Development Congestion

Retail developers' plans to add a turning lane or other improvements to the existing highway are often insufficient to alleviate congestion after the shopping complex becomes established.

While the developers' improvements may improve traffic flow around the new center itself, bottlenecks may occur further away. This is often due to the additional retail development that is constructed after the center is built. As demand for public expenditures to widen roads in the area increases, additional capacity for more retail is thus created, resulting in even more congestion.

Strategy 16A

It is critical for local officials to understand the linkages between transportation and land use before approving major retail projects. Metropolitan planning organizations and county planning commissions can assist municipalities and townships in evaluating how this relationship may affect the community and surrounding area.

Strategy 16B

Ensure that existing and proposed transit centers are linked with major retail nodes. Opportunities for transit-oriented development projects should be explored whenever possible.

Strategy 16C



Figure 10.12. *Bike racks in retail districts are an inexpensive way of providing for an alternative form of transportation.*

Work with the developer to determine how the project can be more transit and pedestrian friendly. This can include working with the regional transit authorities on bringing busses directly into the complex (so that customers do not have to walk through vast and dangerous parking areas) and providing bike racks for those who wish to use this mode of travel. As mentioned earlier in this section, retail projects that include residential and office components are more effective in creating the density needed to support public transit (Figure 10.12).

COMMUNITY RETAIL STRATEGIES

Issue 17: Maintaining Healthy Retail Districts

Once a community has its districts zoned for retail in place, local officials are often uncertain as to what actions they can take to promote and maintain healthy retail districts. Beautification of districts will not in itself attract shoppers; appropriate tenant mix and store quality are also critical factors.

The private sector spends a substantial amount of time and resources during the retail site selection process. Locational criteria involving accessibility and demographics are carefully evaluated before a site is deemed appropriate for a specific store or retail complex. However, communities can also participate in assuring existing and prospective tenants that their community is a good place to do business.

Strategy 17A

Review the recommendations suggested by Main Street Connections for the Northeast Ohio First Suburbs Consortium communities and determine their applicability to other retail districts, particularly as they relate to financing, regulatory structure, physical strategies and marketing..

Strategy 17B

Coordinate efforts with the local development corporation or Chamber of Commerce to market and promote the Retail district as a single entity instead of an agglomeration of individual businesses. Consider the use of business overlay zoning to encourage compatibility.

Strategy 17C

*When a retail area has a long presence involving complementary uses which feed off of each other, it can become a destination for the region. Examples of this type of area includes the Bedford Auto Mile, Coventry Boulevard, and the Lorain Road antique district (**Figure 10.13**).*

Strategy 17D

Promote the uniqueness of community historic retail districts located in the neighborhoods of older cities and the small downtown areas of outlying communities. Enhance, where possible, cultural or natural features located nearby which add to the ambiance of the retail districts. Avoid the introduction of auto-oriented businesses in pedestrian-oriented retail districts.



Figure 10.13. *The Bedford Auto Mile is an example of a regional retail destination.*



Figure 10.14. As new housing develops in revitalized buildings, convenience stores are needed to serve the new residents.

Strategy 17E

Re-establish storefront retailing in downtown Cleveland and the larger cities in surrounding counties. As these areas attract residents with new housing, convenience goods and services will be needed to serve them (Figure 10.14).

Strategy 17F

Consider the establishment of Business Improvement Districts in retail areas where local merchants and property owners would agree to tax themselves to improve maintenance and security.

Strategy 17G

Utilize street fairs, special sales and similar promotions to promote the awareness of retail areas.

Strategy 17H

Avoid the creation of “pedestrian” malls, utilizing instead pedestrian amenities such as benches, landscaping and decorative lighting to add human scale elements to the district.

Strategy 17I



Figure 10.15. The provision of benches and drinking fountains add to the ambiance of retail districts.

Promote linkages with other traffic generators in the area (schools, municipal buildings, etc.), and encourage any new federal, state or local government buildings proposed for the community to be constructed in the main retail district.

Strategy 17J

Coordinate with local merchants to designate responsibilities for cleaning, maintenance of landscaping, and repairing of street furniture; enforce building code regulations; clean and well-cared-for districts create a positive shopping experience (Figure 10.15).

Strategy 17K

In growth communities, prepare build out scenarios to determine how much retail will actually be required to serve the city at saturation and rezone accordingly so as to limit repetitive development which weakens established businesses. Utilize county planning commissions and metropolitan planning organizations to assist in this endeavor.

Strategy 17L

Promote “buy local” programs, particularly for stores selling convenience items.

Strategy 17M

Coordinate with local police departments to establish a strong presence in the retail areas, thereby giving consumers a sense of security.

Strategy 17N

Determine the types of businesses which are lacking in the community through the use of the inventory in this study, as well as the preparation of a retail market analysis and the development of contacts with developers and retailers for the purpose of attracting those businesses to the community.

Strategy 17O

Promote a retail mix which allows customers to visit the district for longer periods of time (sit-down restaurants with areas for outdoor dining, art galleries, unique bookstores, upscale merchandise, farmers’ markets, etc.).

Strategy 17P

Discourage the allowance of marginal non-retail uses in retail zoning districts through zoning regulations.

Strategy 17Q

Since the region has a fairly stable population base and new retail complexes often decrease the market share of older ones, the use of tax abatement for retail development should be discouraged.

Strategy 17R

Prohibit temporary sales of products on vacant lots or parking areas within retail districts since they can compete with established businesses for market share; their presence can be a signal to residents that the district is failing, thus driving them away to other retail areas.

Strategy 17S

Prohibit temporary portable signs in retail districts.

Strategy 17T

Focus more on the quality rather than the quantity of retail establishments.

PHYSICAL DESIGN

Issue 18: Combating Poor Design

While established retail districts serve a variety of civic purposes in addition to providing shopping opportunities, many new retail developments have no public spaces, are devoid of interesting architectural features, and lack pedestrian amenities.

With Americans spending more money but having less time to shop, retailing has become much more convenience-oriented and less a recreational activity. Consequently, *the “sense of place” a person may encounter in the design and human-scale elements in older districts is lacking in many new shopping areas. Although design is only one component of a successful retail district, it can give an area the unique features that distinguish it from other areas.*

Strategy 18A

Utilize the expertise of the Urban Design Center of Northeast Ohio to enhance local retail districts through better design.

Strategy 18B

In areas which already feature buildings built up to the sidewalk, require infill development to be constructed in the same manner to avoid haphazard setbacks and promote architectural harmony (Figure 10.16).

Strategy 18C

Encourage side yard and rear yard parking with appropriately situated store entrances.

Strategy 18D

If eligible, apply for streetscape funding through Community Development Block Grant programs, TEA-21, and other state and federal sources. If successful, work with a landscape architect to assure appropriate types and placement of street trees so that storefronts and signage are not concealed from view or overwhelm the street.

Strategy 18E

Encourage merchants to provide foundation plantings to improve the attractiveness of storefronts.



Figure 10.16. *The City of Lakewood worked with Walgreens to build a new drugstore which mimicked the no-setback buildings it replaced.*

Strategy 18F

Assist local merchants and property owners in applying for storefront renovation programs available through the local community or county.

Issue 19: Promoting Regulations for Better Design

Many communities need regulations to help them foster more attractive retail districts.

The integration of new retail buildings into established areas needs to be carefully assessed. In addition, local officials should be cognizant of community values when approving new retail projects.

Strategy 19A

Develop retail design guidelines to promote compatibility with existing structures. Guidelines should include review of overall site design, landscaping, building orientation, signage and public spaces (Figure 10.17.). The use of garish colors or textures which allow stores to stand out from rather than blend with surrounding buildings should be prohibited, i.e., the painting of brick buildings.



Figure 10.17. *In developing design guidelines, communities should require development that complements existing retail districts.*

Strategy 19B

Review current sign code regulations to determine their consistency with recent court decisions.

Strategy 19C

Improve buffering standards to reduce conflicts between retail stores and adjoining residential districts.

Strategy 19D

Discourage the use of boards and paper to cover windows of vacant stores as they can become indicators of blight.

Strategy 19E

Although many retailers prefer to construct large, big box stores, encourage appropriate design details which would make them easier to be reused should they become vacant.

BUILDING REUTILIZATION, MODIFICATIONS AND REDEVELOPMENT

Issue 20: Conversion of Residential to Retail

In many outlying areas, residential homes are converted to retail uses in areas zoned for retail.

Since housing is not intended for retail use, problems regarding parking, signs, storage areas and merchandise layout often develop. If not done properly, this can lead to substandard conditions. While some retail uses such as small restaurants, bed and breakfasts and professional offices can be adapted quite well from residential structures, many retail uses are incompatible with converted homes.

Strategy 20A

For historic or architecturally significant homes in retail zoned areas, every effort should be made to retain them; therefore, providing for orderly conversions through flexible building code amendments should be considered (Figure 10.18).

Strategy 20B

Parking in front yards of converted houses should be discouraged as it detracts from building character.

Strategy 20C

Where concentrations of historic structures along major arterials exist, consider the potential of rezoning to a residence-professional office or transitional use district with specific standards spelled out in the zoning code.

Issue 21: Preserving Existing Buildings

New stores, particularly those which are proposed by national chains, are reluctant to preserve old buildings which they consider obsolete when they build new or expand.

Locational preferences dictate the desirability of a site for a new or expanded use. With corporate policies spelling out the need for larger stores in order to increase sales volume, national firms in many cases are insensitive to residents' desires to retain community character through the preservation of historic or architecturally unique buildings. While some communities have persuaded large retailers to modify their proposals to be more compatible with their surroundings and community sentiment, others have been greeted with a "take it or leave it" approach. In such cases, the retailer may choose to locate in an adjoining community, thereby denying the original host the tax benefits they need, but leaving them with the negative impacts.



Figure 10.18. *Converting existing homes to retail uses such as restaurants or bed and breakfasts is an appealing option in some areas.*

Strategy 21A

Conduct an inventory of historically or architecturally significant buildings which need to be preserved in any redevelopment scheme. Pass an ordinance listing these buildings as historically or architecturally significant and impose regulations on their reuse (Figure 10.19). Consider the establishment of a historic district and the use of historic tax credits where possible.



Figure 10.19. *Altering building facades severely affects the architectural integrity of unique structures.*

Strategy 21B

Once a firm has approached a community with a proposal which will impact existing retail structures, it is important for local officials to measure the attitude of residents regarding the project through a public meeting or survey.

Strategy 21C

If overall public reaction to the project is negative, consider holding small meetings with opponents and the firm's representatives to determine how local concerns can be mitigated.

Strategy 21D

Once a compromise is reached, coordinate with the project architect to ensure that the revised plan is implemented in an appropriate fashion.

Strategy 21E

Cooperate with and, if necessary, provide assistance to developers who are willing to demolish blighted buildings or clean up contaminated properties for a retail project.

BUSINESS CONCERNS

Issue 22: Keeping Local Businesses Competitive

Local businesses are facing more challenges today in their efforts to remain profitable.

As mentioned earlier in this report, competition from national retailers, including big box stores, newer and more numerous stores in outlying areas and E-commerce have made it increasingly difficult for small local stores to remain in business.

Strategy 22A

It is important for local retailers to fill the niche markets that superstores, because of their size, are unable to meet. Understanding the local demand for both products and services and carrying local brands are essential for success.

Strategy 22B

Focus on improving customer service, product knowledge, easy refund policies and the development of personal relationships with patrons.

Strategy 22C

Consider the establishment of frequent buyer discounts and local coupon distribution.³

Strategy 22D

Become or stay active in the community with regard to sponsorships, events and promotions.

Strategy 22E

Establish a web-site to complement brick and mortar sales to expose products to a larger customer base.

Strategy 22F

Take advantage of existing community storefront renovation programs (Figure 10.20).

Strategy 22G

Focus on encouraging an enjoyable shopping experience by providing appropriate seating if suitable, an attractive facade and window display, good signage, adequate parking and clean premises.



Figure 10.20. Storefront renovation programs can assist retail property owners in improving facades, signs and streetscape elements.

RETAIL SITE SELECTION PROCESS
Issue 23: Avoiding the “One Size Fits All” syndrome

As large national retailers have expanded into northeast Ohio, they have often taken a “one size fits all” approach with respect to store location, building design, store size or other requirements.

Such corporate policies can be extremely detrimental to established retail districts which do not fit the mold of the “ideal” site. Therefore, older communities are placed at a competitive disadvantage with respect to attracting new retailers. Many developers prefer the ease of erecting standardized new buildings to the expense of renovating older structures.

Strategy 23A

National retailers need to become more flexible in their site location and store requirement standards. While some firms have recognized the unique characteristics which comprise individual business districts, others continue to insist on cookie cutter practices which promote auto dependency and corporate identity.

Strategy 23B

Local officials who view this practice as a serious concern should promote awareness through local government advocacy groups such as the National Conference of Mayors and the National Association of Counties. They, in turn, may wish to voice their concern with national retail trade organizations such as the International Council of Shopping Centers, the National Retail Federation and the Urban Land Institute.

Issue 24: Retailing Opportunities in Central Cities

National and regional retailers need to recognize the potential opportunities for expanding their market areas into more densely developed central cities and mature suburbs which are already served by excellent transportation and infrastructure networks.

Many retailers prefer to build new stores in high growth, high income and easily accessible communities since this formula has proven successful in other areas. The demand for these sites is illustrated by the agglomeration of competing stores near the same location.

Strategy 24A

Using the information gathered for this study, older communities should advocate their position through groups such as the First Suburbs Consortium to national retail trade organizations. The combined population of these communities should serve as a powerful marketing tool to attract retailers who have traditionally shunned these urbanized areas in favor of easily developable, clean greenfield sites in outlying areas.

Strategy 24B

City officials in older and mature communities need to lobby state officials for funding programs which can help them compete for prime retailers. Such assistance could be used for site clearance or building rehabilitation, land assembly and infrastructure improvements in and around older retail districts.

Issue 25: Avoiding Retail Property Tax Reductions

There is a concern that retail overbuilding is affecting property tax revenues in many communities.

Many retail property owners request property tax reductions as a result of new development impacting their sales revenues. Thus, schools and communities are losing property tax revenues, even from stores which have recently been constructed.

Strategy 25A

An assessment of commercial tax reduction requests in the region over the past decade should be conducted to determine the extent of the problem. If it is apparent that an excessive number of requests is being made and granted, an official review of tax revision procedures should be undertaken. ■

- 1 Urban Land Institute and International Council of Shopping Centers, "Shopping Center Parking Requirements." JCS Research Quarterly, Winter 1999–2000.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Geddes, Annmarie, "Strategies to Help You Compete Against Top Retailers," Small Business News, August, 1994.