

Mixed Use: What Makes It Work?

Convenience is a virtue in modern life, and mixed use developments aim to make the services people want—stores, libraries, parks, schools, work places, and so on—more convenient to where they live.

Mixed use can encompass a wide range of developments and districts from a traditional village main street to Rochester's colleegetown to the neighborhood corner store to a new master-planned community—anywhere people can move conveniently between home and other uses.

Mixed use is seen as a way to pump new life into struggling urban, suburban, and rural commercial areas; increase the independence of seniors, the physically less-abled, and those without cars; attract young professionals and tourists; preserve green spaces; and contain public infrastructure expenses.

Mixed use, in other words, can address many community needs when done right. Mixed use, like all development, should be undertaken in the context of local and regional real estate markets. But what other factors influence the success of a mixed use project regardless of size, type, or location?

Communities and developers should be mindful of the following as they consider mixed use:

- ◆ *Is there a mix of different uses?* The whole point is to provide a mix of neighborhood services close to where people live.
- ◆ *Are uses complementary?* Complementary uses help create a synergy that promotes social interaction and community pride.
- ◆ *Are uses economically viable?* Successful mixed use begins with a stable economic base.
- ◆ *Do uses support one another economically?* Diverse but complementary uses work together to create a dynamic, prosperous setting.
- ◆ *Are uses connected by sidewalks or paved paths?* Walkways make it easier for people to park their cars and get out and walk.
- ◆ *Are uses within convenient walking distance of one another?* Development should be compact enough for people to walk easily to adjacent uses.
- ◆ *Are walking routes short and direct?* Walkways should be logical, convenient, and easy to access.

- ◆ *Has walkability in cold weather been considered?* In Upstate New York’s cold climate, a walking distance of no more than 1/8th of a mile (660’) is preferred. Design features that encourage walking should be incorporated, such as overhead canopies, enclosed walkways with temporary transparent walls, wind breaks, etc.
- ◆ *Is there central public open space?* Well designed public spaces should be integrated with the surrounding architecture and function to create gathering areas that are safe for all users.
- ◆ *Do uses take advantage of site opportunities?* Each community and each setting is different, and each has different opportunities and constraints to be considered in site and building design.
- ◆ *Do buildings complement one another?* The architecture of individual structures within a mixed use district should create both visual interest and visual continuity. For example, using similar window styles, materials, or architectural styles helps create a sense of visual consistency.
- ◆ *Do uses create activity at different times of the day?* Not all uses should occur within a mixed use district at the same time. Including both daytime and evening uses helps create a dynamic, vibrant setting and allows parking and other features to be shared.
- ◆ *Is parking reduced?* Reducing the amount of parking will result in smaller parking lots and provide space for other uses, such as public open space.
- ◆ *Are onsite parking alternatives, such as valet parking or transit, available?* Many mixed use projects have “for lease” signs on them because they deny the reality of the car. People want to park near where they go, but that doesn’t have to mean providing a close-in parking space for every possible car.
- ◆ *Are uses sensitive to adjacent land uses?* Successful mixed use developments are considerate of their neighbors in terms of building types, scale, density, overall character, and circulation.
- ◆ Are the number of different uses proportional to the size of the development?

<u>Size of mixed use development</u>	<u>Minimum number of uses</u>
> 30 acres	4 different uses
2 to 30 acres	3 different uses
< 2 acres	2 different uses

Adapted from the GTC-funded Mixed Use Development Manual, Penfield, NY, draft July 2013, www.penfield.org/Mixed_Use_Districts.php.

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