

4. SHOP

Creating Vibrant Destinations



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Like many communities around the nation, much of Cary's commercial spaces were developed at a time when convenience and automobile accessibility were the priorities for commercial center designs. Times have changed, and both younger and older generations crave a new type of shopping and dining experience that is more connected, walkable, and provides engaging public spaces where residents can interact. Cary has an opportunity to retrofit some of its suburban commercial centers into vibrant community destinations that can attract visitors to the Town and provide desired shopping and dining options for local residents.

CARY VALUES:

Managing Future Land Use

Cary will manage land to create a distinctive, attractive, physical environment for our growing and diverse community while maintaining our predominant suburban character. Development should focus on creating and maintaining high-quality commercial areas and strong residential neighborhoods complemented by walkable mixed use activity nodes that serve all age groups.

Encouraging Redevelopment and Infill Efforts

Cary will focus redevelopment efforts on underperforming land and building assets, and focus new infill development on vacant areas that are already served by existing infrastructure. Older declining commercial centers and commercial areas are key redevelopment priorities, and downtown represents a good opportunity to invest in a way that creates an active, walkable mixed use environment which yields greater economic value and is a point of pride for Cary.

4. SHOP

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Changing Retail and Commercial Preferences

Consumer preferences have changed. Ultra-convenient online shopping and the growing demand for unique shopping and dining experiences have had an impact on the way commercial centers are now designed and the types of environments in which they are located. Just as emerging technologies and the post World War II proliferation of the automobile created a shift in the location and design of commercial destinations to suburban contexts, our nation is experiencing the next wave that is driven by consumer preferences for more walkable, mixed use, compact, and vibrant shopping destinations.

While there is still a limited market for traditional strip-commercial development, the growing trend across the nation is development of lifestyle centers that provide walkable urban environments convenient to home and work. These centers contain additional amenities, such as outdoor entertainment venues, outdoor markets, and public art and gathering spaces. Often called “third places,” these new commercial mixed use

destinations provide not only the opportunity to shop and dine in high quality establishments, they also provide the opportunity to gather and interact with other people outside of work and home. And national trends show a growing preference for actually living or working within mixed use environments, particularly for young professionals and to some extent retirees.

Due to these trends, retailers across the nation are expanding into urban markets and are often shrinking the design of stores to better fit these contexts. Niche shopping opportunities, attractions, and service-oriented establishments are growing retail market segments; and many older suburban centers are evolving to provide this new shopping experience.



North Hills Mall in 1984

Since its beginnings in the 1950s, North Hills Mall in Raleigh has evolved from a small strip shopping center, to the Southeast's first enclosed shopping mall, and is now a vibrant lifestyle center. Today, North Hills offers a mix of commercial shopping and dining destinations, offices, housing units, and community event spaces, all within a walkable and engaging environment.



North Hills Converted to a Lifestyle Center in 2010

Aging Commercial Centers

Cary has a wide array of commercial centers, at a variety of sizes and scales serving neighborhood, community, and regional needs, many of which were built decades ago. These centers are located across Cary's planning area and set the locational framework for future commercial development. Today, some of these commercial centers are experiencing vacancies and some may be viewed as having obsolete designs by prospective businesses looking for new commercial space. At the same time, new commercial developments are being developed in Cary that cater to 21st century shopping and dining preferences in both the downtown and walkable suburban locations, such as the Arboretum, Stone Creek Village, and Waverly Place.

While Cary does have a strong local retail market, it is still important to ensure that aging commercial centers evolve over time to remain competitive in the marketplace, and to maintain high build and design quality that protects surrounding neighborhoods from the impacts of decline.

Retail and commercial centers have a typical life cycle of 25 years, at which time significant retrofitting is often needed to maintain market viability. Between now and 2032 the number of commercial centers in Cary that are more than 25 years old will nearly triple. Cary's aging commercial centers represent some of the most important opportunities for commercial infill and redevelopment in town. Since commercial vacancies can lead to blight and abandonment, and have significant impacts on surrounding employment centers and neighborhoods, careful attention will need to be paid to aging or troubled commercial centers.

Redevelopment is much more expensive and challenging to achieve than "greenfield" development on vacant land. In order to make it financially viable to successfully redevelop established commercial centers, project developers will likely need to maximize the use of the site's land by creating more compact development forms, mixing uses, and using higher intensity development to offset the considerable costs of redevelopment.

2.5
million square feet of retail development
was 40 years old or older in 2012

11.2
million square feet of retail development
will be 40 years old or older in 2032

Over the next 20 years, the number of commercial establishments that are 25 years or older will nearly triple, changing the development context in Cary to one that focuses primarily on infill and redevelopment.

Demand for More Commercial Options

As evidenced through community surveys, Cary's growing population and local economy are increasing the demand for new types of retail businesses, dining establishments, and commercial services that are not yet offered in Cary, particularly within downtown. Residents and workers want more unique, distinctive, and authentic choices for dining and entertainment, including park-once-and-walk environments that offer vibrant public spaces. Downtown was identified as an area where there is high demand for attractions and shopping locations. (See also the Downtown Special Planning Area.) The redevelopment of aging commercial centers is also another opportunity to provide new shopping and dining opportunities and unique commercial "experiences."



Elizabeth's Home and Garden Shop on Chatham Street in Downtown Cary (above) and Cary's Waverly Place Commercial Center (below) are examples of downtown and suburban community shopping establishments that offer the types of environments and shopping experiences that customers in Cary desire.

Demand for High Quality Destination Centers with Character

Cary's high quality built environment is widely known and is largely comprised of suburban scale commercial centers and shopping malls of various sizes and scales. What is currently under-represented in Cary are high quality, mixed use destination centers that can draw customers from across the region to visit unique venues and shopping and dining establishments. High quality destination centers often include signature elements such as entertainment venues, gathering spaces, fountains, unique architecture, and memorable public art installations. The mixing of uses that can occur in these destination centers often create active and inviting public environments both during the day and at night that offer true live, work, play experiences.



FUTURE GROWTH FRAMEWORK

Chapter 6: SHAPE, sets out a framework to guide Cary’s future growth and development. The framework includes a Future Growth Framework Map that specifies the locations where ten broad development categories apply within Cary’s planning area. That framework includes three development categories for future commercial and mixed use development: Commercial Centers, Commercial Mixed Use Centers, and Destination Centers. This page provides an overview of those categories, while Chapter 6 provides more detailed descriptions.

Commercial Center

Character

Traditional commercial center that serves daily retail and service needs of nearby neighborhoods. Typically located at major street intersections, commercial centers are designed to maximize convenience by accommodating proximate parking near stores, typically along the front or side of the commercial center. Centers should be walkable and connect to adjacent developments. Commercial centers may also include office space and residential uses such as townhomes and multifamily. Uses may be mixed horizontally (on adjacent sites or buildings) or vertically (within buildings), and are typically served by surface parking lots.

Building Heights

1-3 stories



Commercial Mixed Use Center

Character

Prominent commercial mixed use center that includes an integrated mix of commercial/retail, office, and higher-density residential, such as multifamily and townhomes. The center should include a significant amount of vertically-mixed buildings, having ground floor retail or office uses, and offices and housing on upper floors. Urban designs frame the street with multi-story buildings and active public spaces.

Building Heights

4-6 stories, transitioning down to adjacent single-family neighborhoods



Destination Center

Character

High density mixed use regional destination center that may include special uses, such as a prominent and unique entertainment venue. The center includes an integrated mix of commercial/retail, office, and higher-density residential, such as multifamily. The center should be characterized by vertically-mixed buildings having ground floor retail or office, with offices and housing on upper floors. Urban designs frame the street with multistory buildings and active public spaces.

Building Heights

7+ stories, transitioning down to adjacent single-family neighborhoods or other less intensive developments



POLICY DIRECTION

In order to respond to the shopping and mixed use challenges and opportunities facing Cary, including providing high quality, mixed use, and pedestrian-oriented commercial destinations of various scales that are well-integrated into the existing urban fabric of the community, the Town of Cary’s *Shop* policies are:

Policy	Policy Intent
Policy 1: Facilitate Redevelopment of Underperforming Commercial Centers	
<p>Facilitate the redevelopment and revitalization of Cary’s aging or poorly-performing commercial centers as well as Downtown Cary. Redevelopment of older centers to more vibrant and attractive destinations is preferred over the development of new commercial centers.</p>	<p>The intent of this policy statement is to address underdeveloped and underperforming (i.e., aging, blighted, and vacant) commercial centers that are having an impact on community character and property values. Implementation of this policy could include incentives to encourage developers to reinvest in existing commercial centers and redevelop the centers to better meet current retail and shopping preferences.</p>
Policy 2: Focus Commercial Uses within Commercial Mixed Use Centers, Destination Centers, Downtown, and Commercial Centers	
<p>Focus commercial, retail, dining, and entertainment uses within existing and planned Commercial Mixed Use and Destination Centers, Downtown, and Commercial Centers as designated on the Future Growth Framework map.</p>	<p>The intent of this policy is to direct new commercial development to appropriate locations identified on the Future Growth Framework map: Commercial Centers, Commercial Mixed Use Centers, Downtown, and Destination Centers. This also includes secondary commercial uses in Employment Mixed Use Campuses.</p> <p>See Policy 7 in <i>Chapter 6: Shape</i> for additional opportunities for commercial uses outside of commercial development areas.</p>
Policy 3: Support the Development of a Limited Number of Destination Centers and Commercial Mixed Use Centers	
<p>In addition to Downtown, support the development of a limited number of Destination Centers and Commercial Mixed Use Centers that will have Cary’s highest densities and intensities of mixed use development, will be transit supportive, and will have the greatest potential to be high-functioning, premier centers.</p>	<p>This policy statement encourages the development of a limited number of high quality, vibrant, mixed use Destination and Commercial Mixed Use Centers that will provide a mix and intensity of uses that is higher than currently found in Cary’s existing mixed use or commercial centers. The locations of future Destination and Commercial Mixed Use Centers, as well as Downtown, are identified on the Future Growth Framework map. Implementation of this policy will require changes to the Town’s Land Development Ordinance to allow for and encourage higher density development in these locations.</p>

HOW WE WILL ACHIEVE OUR VISION

1 Promote and Enable Revitalization of Existing Commercial Centers

Local governments are typically the leaders or catalysts for redevelopment efforts, laying the groundwork for private investment and new development. The Town of Cary will seek to participate in redevelopment projects that offer significant community benefits. A number of existing centers might present such opportunities in the coming decade(s), such as Cary Towne Center and other similar centers. Town partnerships might include assistance with infrastructure improvements, the location of public facilities, or other types of assistance to foster redevelopment.

Major Actions:

- Review all Town development regulations to identify and remove disincentives for redevelopment.
- Create baseline economic health indicators for aging commercial centers as a first step in evaluating the need for a Minimum Commercial Code.
- Develop evaluation criteria to guide public investments in redevelopment projects.
- Create new infill and redevelopment design guidelines that balance the goal of encouraging redevelopment with the goal of protecting the character of adjacent neighborhoods.



Seeing the need to both promote redevelopment to address its decaying downtown and to promote preservation of its historic assets, Asheville, North Carolina, has embraced public-private partnerships to turn downtown from a derelict urban center to a successful international destination. The City has supported redevelopment of the central business district by investing in public infrastructure, such as landscaping, and street and sidewalk improvements, as well as purchasing land and restoring a historic building for a school district administrative building. These projects have demonstrated the City's support for downtown redevelopment, and have spurred additional private sector investment.

An important part of redevelopment is creating unique public spaces that are memorable and inviting, and art is an important component of the public realm. The Town of Cary promotes public art through site-specific and community specific artworks that enhance the public realm, deepen a sense of place and civic identity, stimulate community dialogue, and transform Cary's public spaces into vibrant and meaningful places. Shown here is an art installation in Cary's Stone Creek Village entitled "Wind Plow."



2 Support and Enable Vibrant Mixed-Use and Destination Centers

Major Actions:

- Amend Cary's Land Development Ordinance and design guidelines to enable and guide development/ redevelopment of destination centers and commercial mixed-use centers, as well as shopping centers. Consider utilizing a form-based or hybrid code to foster design creativity and a sense of place.
- Identify and prioritize locations for catalyst public infrastructure investments or other forms of Town participation.
- Update the Alston Plan to align more closely with Destination Center goals.



The redevelopment of the Cottonwood regional suburban shopping mall in Holladay, Utah, is being achieved through a deliberate planning and design process that brought the City, developers, and the public together using a charrette design process to iteratively determine the future design of the site. A critical next step after the design for the project was established was the creation of a new regional mixed use zoning district and the rezoning approval of the site to this new district.

DESIGN CONCEPTS FOR TRANSITIONS BETWEEN CENTERS AND NEIGHBORHOODS

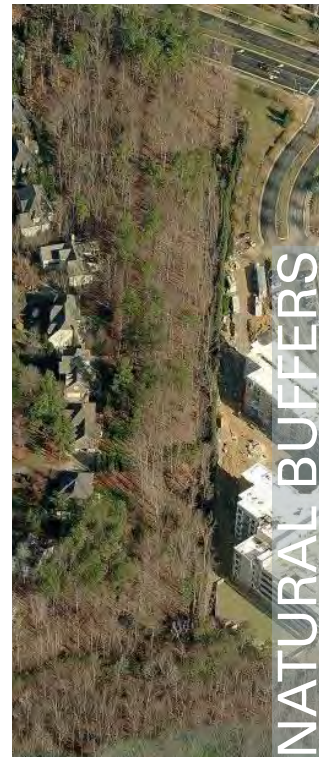
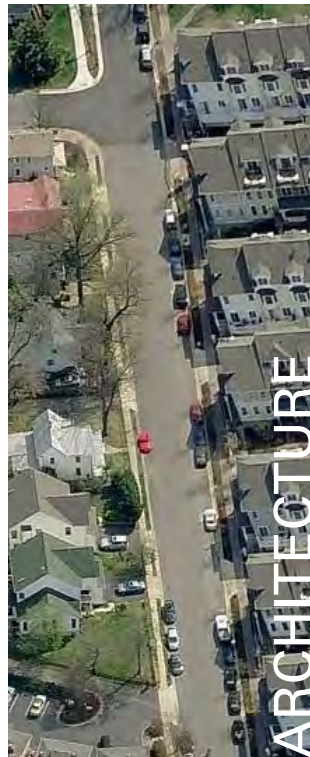
TRANSITION APPROACHES

Providing for the growth of mixed-use centers raises the challenge of how to transition between these new denser areas and established neighborhoods. **Determining the appropriate design approach for managing transitions between developments will depend on the objectives for the transitional space: separate developments or connect them.** This section sets out different approaches to making transitions that can be considered when approving future mixed use developments.

Design can be used to smooth connections between individual developments. An attractive, walkable, transitional space can be achieved through building form, land use, and architectural elements.

Design can also be used to separate and protect neighborhoods through the preservation of or planting of a natural buffer. Walkable connections to surrounding neighborhoods can be the lifeblood of mixed use spaces, but there are still times where it will be appropriate to provide separation.

This section highlights several examples for creating transitions between mixed use centers and existing neighborhoods: connecting with (1) form, (2) use, and (3) architecture, or separating with (4) natural buffers. These four strategies are not mutually exclusive, and a good design transition could make use of one or many of these approaches.



FORM TRANSITIONS

In the transitional space between a dense mixed use center and an established neighborhood, the building forms themselves can be varied to provide for a visually appealing gradient of change that does not negatively impact the views from within the neighborhood. This strategy typically includes stepping down the height and bulk of buildings in the transitional space.

Lyndhurst Ave in Charlotte effectively uses this strategy. In this case, the transition from a multi-story big-box anchor is created first by wrapped attached townhomes around the commercial building, and then stepping down in building mass and height to a row of apartment buildings that are a similar mass as the neighborhood homes across the local street. The effect is a smooth and pleasing visual transition between building forms. The transition space from the commercial center to the neighborhood is approximately the depth of two neighborhood lots.



Charlotte, NC: Street Level View of Form Transition

The multi-story commercial center all-but disappears at street level using this approach. In this particular example, the dense use is masked by transitions in building from large block commercial, to mid-size townhomes, to smaller sized apartments, to single-family homes.

- ① Multi-story commercial building with wrapped townhomes
- ② Mid-size apartment buildings
- ③ Single-family Neighborhood



Charlotte, NC: Aerial View of Form Transition

From the air, the mass of the commercial building is easily visible (in this case, a big-box construction and hardware store). The variety and placement of building forms in the transitional space helps create a gradual and connected relationship between the center and the adjacent neighborhood.

USE TRANSITIONS

Transitions can also be made using changes in uses, from more intense to less intense to create a gradual shift from the mixed-use center to the neighborhood. One strategy is to create the transition using multifamily residential as an intermediate use between the commercial center and the neighborhood. Another is to allow homes on the edge of the established neighborhood to be reused as small offices. Still another is to fill the transition with civic or recreation space.

The first variation of this strategy, using townhomes, is found in Southern Village in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. This approach creates a smooth transition between the different intensities of uses. Residents of the neighborhood do not feel like they are located adjacent to a mixed use center, but do enjoy the benefits of walking to its amenities.



Chapel Hill, NC: Street Level View of Use Transition

The townhomes (#2) are a much more compatible use to the single-family neighborhood. The mixed-use center was also designed to make use of topography and building placement to mask views from the neighborhood.

- ① Commercial Center
- ② Townhomes
- ③ Single Family Residential



Chapel Hill, NC: Aerial View of Use Transition

The design of the master planned development balances the need to limit the visual impacts of the denser mixed use center from the neighborhood, while also providing a connected and walkable environment for residents living in single-family homes on the edge of the development.

ARCHITECTURAL TRANSITIONS

In the transitional space between a denser mixed use center and an established neighborhood, the architectural treatment of new development can create a cohesive connection between the neighborhood and the center, while allowing for different uses to be proximate to each other. Common elements of this strategy include matching neighborhood character through building materials and architectural design elements such as roof lines.

The Clarendon Market Common in Arlington, Virginia, effectively uses this strategy to transition between a large mixed use development and an adjacent single-family neighborhood. The multifamily units adjacent to the neighborhood are larger than a house, but the design of the building pulls elements from the surroundings, so that if walking or driving toward Market Common along local streets, the larger development appears to be just more of the same neighborhood. Even in places where the density difference is obvious, the structures still look like they belong to a collective whole.

- ① Largest Buildings of Mixed Use Center
- ② Attached Townhomes Imitating Context
- ③ Single-family Neighborhood



Arlington, VA: Street View of Architectural Transitions

By using architectural elements from the surrounding neighborhood, the much larger mixed use center is masked and becomes just one more part of the neighborhood vista. By replicating the pitched roofs, the designer limited views of the largest buildings in the development.



Arlington, VA: Aerial View of Architectural Transitions

From the air, it is clear how quickly the transition occurs, and residents can take advantage of that proximity to walk to amenities. On the local street the extent of the development is well hidden, and denser housing is made to blend in through the use of common architectural features.

NATURAL BUFFER TRANSITIONS

For situations that require separation of uses and that connectivity is not an objective, natural buffers can be preserved or planted to provide separation between uses. The thickness of the buffer can vary from a narrow strip to a large woods, and the natural area itself may be sparse or dense forest. Trees work best for visually blocking the uses from each other. The buffers may be municipal land, they may be owned by the neighborhood homeowner association, or they may be owned by the mixed use center development.

The Town of Cary itself has many examples of this strategy. A narrow buffer between The Arboretum and an adjacent residential neighborhood provides a visual block between the two developments. A similar type buffer occurs in many other areas of Town.



The Arboretum, Cary, NC: Street View of Natural Transition

From the neighborhood, you can see homes and the taller trees of the buffer. The higher density buildings disappear from view.

- ① Multi-family Apartments and Shopping
- ② Natural Tree Buffer
- ③ Single-family Neighborhood



The Arboretum, Cary, NC: Aerial View of Natural Transition

From the air, the sharp division is visible. The separation preserves neighborhood character and limits visual and physical access to the commercial center.

ADDITIONAL TRANSITION EXAMPLES



FORM: Chevy Chase, MD

On this street near Bethesda Row, the form of buildings change as you move away from a dense corridor on the right. Gradually the size reduces to the scale of the rest of the neighborhood.



USE: Garden City, NY

This neighborhood (at the top) experiences a use transition, with recreation and civic buildings in the transitional space and the commercial uses at the bottom.



ARCHITECTURE: Boulder, CO

This neighborhood commercial building takes many architectural cues from its neighbor.



NATURAL BUFFER: Raleigh, NC

Thicker buffers that separate mixed use centers and adjacent single-family neighborhoods, such as this one on St. Albans drive in Raleigh, can also serve as a park or amenity for residents in the new higher density housing.

RELATED POLICY DIRECTION IN OTHER CHAPTERS

This plan has been organized to address specific topics in specific chapters; however, the policies listed throughout this plan are very much interrelated. Listed here are the policies included in other plan chapters that relate to the Town’s policies on commercial development.

Shop: Creating Vibrant Destinations	Live:	Work:	Engage:	Shape:	Move:	Serve:
	Fostering Strong Neighborhoods	Assuring Continued Prosperity	Experiencing the Cary Community	Guiding Community Growth	Providing Transportation Choices	Meeting Community Needs
	Policy #4: Provide the Greatest Variety of Housing Options in Mixed Use Centers	Policy #1: Grow A Sustainable and Diversifying Workforce Policy #2: Enhance Locational Appeal to Businesses and Workers Policy #7: Ensure the Economic Growth and Vitality of Downtown Policy #8: Support the Locational Needs of New and Expanding Firms Policy #10: Reserve and Provide Employment Sites in Selected Commercial Mixed Use and Destination Centers	Parks, Recreation & Cultural Resources Master Plan Goal #2 Public Art Master Plan Vision	Policy #1: Distribute Commercial Centers, Mixed-Use Centers, and Destination Centers Across Town Policy #2: Focus the Most Intense Types of Development in Strategic Locations Policy #3: Encourage Mixed-Use Development Policy #4: Support and Facilitate Redevelopment and Infill Development Policy #5: Support the Revitalization of Targeted Development Corridors Policy #6: Provide Appropriate Transitions Between Land Uses	Policy #7: Target Transit Investments	