



New urbanism

Mixed-use structures offer work, play and living in one

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By MARK KAWAR / The Press-Enterprise

Between sprawling subdivisions, packed freeways and shops crowded into malls, the City of San Bernardino is planning a development that will combine homes, offices, shops and artists' studios in the same neighborhood, emphasizing walking instead of driving.

Within the next few months, the city's first two mixed-use projects will go before San Bernardino's planning commission. The city hopes the projects will spawn new businesses that attract foot traffic, create vibrant commercial areas and maybe get a few cars off the roads.

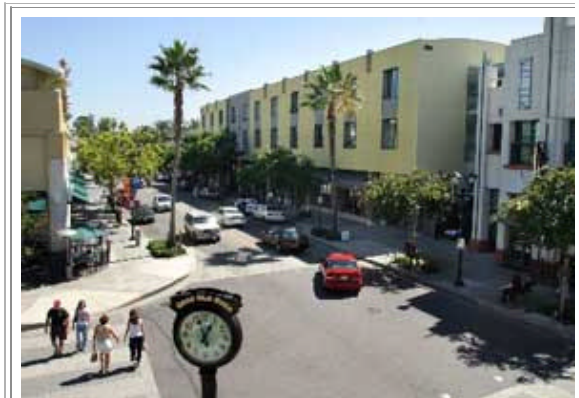
"Times have changed," said James Funk, director of development services for the city of San Bernardino. "People want work flexibility. They want to work at home. They want to live near their work. They want to walk to shops."

Funk described the two planned developments as "experiments" that he hoped will inspire more such projects if they succeed. In early 2006, Funk said, the Planning Commission will likely amended the city's zoning code to set standards for mixed-use projects, with the goal of making city approval for future projects easier.

The larger of the two planned developments, called the Art Colony, is part of Watson & Associates' University Park subdivision at University Boulevard and North Park Boulevard. The Art Colony will have 22 units, each with upstairs living space and a ground floor suitable for art studios or offices. Prices have not been set.

Watson Vice President Chuck Diamond said the Art Colony is designed for professors and artists affiliated with nearby Cal State San Bernardino who want to run businesses such as galleries or consulting offices out of their homes. The development is within walking distance of the university.

Sant Khalsa, director of the university's art department, consulted with Watson as it designed the project, suggesting features to make the first-floor studios more suitable for artists, such as larger doors, higher ceilings and extra lighting. Khalsa, who does her photography and installation work from her studio at the university, said she is considering moving to the new development.



Steven Lewis / Special to The Press-Enterprise
Pedestrians pass by the corner of West Birch Street and Madrona Avenue on Wednesday in an area of Brea that has been redeveloped to incorporate living areas with retail stores.

"There's a stereotype of a lonely, struggling artist," she said. But "artists thrive in a community of artists, where they can share ideas, collaborate."

San Bernardino's second planned mixed-use development is located downtown - on 3rd Street between Sierra Way and Waterman Avenue.

Transtech Engineers Inc. President Ali Cayir said the development is designed for lawyers, doctors and other professionals who want to have offices in a walkable, downtown environment. Plans call for 12 three-story units with offices on the first floor and living space upstairs. Cayir said the first units will be ready before the end of next year and will likely sell for between \$400,000 and \$450,000.

"If you look at the geography of the downtown area, it's very small, very walkable," Cayir said. "I think we have overemphasized driving in the past. Not only are our freeways not catching up, I don't know if they ever could catch up."

U.S. Census data indicates workers in San Bernardino County spent an average of 28 minutes commuting to work in 2000, compared to the national average of 24 minutes. Workers in Riverside County spent 31 minutes commuting to work. In 1990, the average commute for the two counties was 28 minutes.

Across the country, long commutes and a desire for more tightly knit communities are leading to more mixed-use development, said Center for the New Urbanism spokesman Steve Filmanowicz. By encouraging walking, areas with both residential and commercial buildings increase human interaction and create a sense of community, he said.

"One hundred years ago, this was the sort of community that was created naturally," said Filmanowicz. Mixed-use developments "try to recapture what makes a place special."

According to an annual survey by New Urban News magazine, the number of planned mixed-use communities of at least 15 acres -- much larger than the two San Bernardino developments -- has increased from 648 to 754 between January 2004 and January 2005.

The idea of less segregation between homes and businesses has slowly been gaining attention across the Inland area.

Riverside is negotiating with a developer to build over 400 condominiums above street-level stores and restaurants along Market Street downtown. Palm Springs planners have floated the idea of converting Desert Fashion Plaza shopping mall into a combined condominium and retail project. And the developer buying San Bernardino's Carousel Mall has said it would like to replace the struggling mall with a mix of condominiums, shops and offices.

Ontario, Corona and Montclair also have mixed-use projects in the planning phase. Funk said several developers are watching the two proposed mixed-use projects before submitting their own plans for similar developments.

Elsewhere in Southern California, whole cities have been organized around new-urbanist architectural ideas, including dense development, a mix of residential, commercial and office uses and walkable street plans that discourage driving within the community.

Nine years ago, Brea in Orange County, launched a massive redevelopment of its downtown. Working under a master plan created by the city for the downtown, developers tore down dozens of buildings the city called "blighted" and built 96 cottage-style houses, two movie theaters, a shopping center and 62 loft-style apartments over shops and offices.

Pasadena, in Los Angeles County, has similarly tried to re-create a small town-style downtown amidst suburban sprawl.

The architectural firm of Moule & Polyzoides has created four mixed-use developments around Metrolink stations in Pasadena and South Pasadena in the past five years. The first project, Mission Station, included courtyard housing, single-family houses, duplexes, and mixed-use lofts.

Funk, the San Bernardino planner, said that since the city gave its support to mixed-use projects, officials from Highland and Fontana have asked him for advice about the possibility of similar projects in their cities.

"This will bring people to walk downtown at night and on weekends," he said. "It will bring investment to an area that hasn't had a lot of investment."

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