Pattern 2: Shopping Streets

"Encourage the gradual formation of a promenade at the heart of every community, linking the main activity nodes…Put main points of attraction at the two ends, to keep a constant movement up and down."
– Christopher Alexander

Shopping Streets are a special part of a mobility-friendly town or city. Whether a lone Main Street or part of a more extensive central business district, a shopping street is often the liveliest public space to be found in a community. The pedestrian-oriented shopping street is an ancient, worldwide community form that maintains its relevance for New Jersey municipalities today. Often serving as the heart of a community, it is more than a travel way or collection of stores – it is a place where people are drawn to walk, shop, linger and meet friends and neighbors. Residents come often; visitors are drawn to return. People who come to shop stay to talk, and vice versa. Such streets are also ideal locations for festivals and parades.

Shopping streets are best able to fulfill these community functions when traffic moves slowly, parking is plentiful but visually unobtrusive, pedestrians can cross and recross the street easily, and the overall environment is appealing and secure. When these conditions are attained, the street becomes a place that people of all ages can enjoy and find useful, as well as a source of local revenue. Shopping streets work well when the quality of the public environment receives higher priority than traffic flow on the street itself. However, many of New Jersey's "Main Streets" are also important arterial roads, so traffic flow cannot be ignored.

A successful shopping street is more than the sum of its parts. It may contain many of the semi-public retail and restaurant spaces that form the identity of a community, along with important services such as barber shops, laundromats, libraries, and banks. In some New Jersey communities, the local diner or fast-food restaurant is an important gathering spot for senior citizens; the pizza shop may be the main hangout for youth sports teams. In larger towns and cities, cafés, theaters, and night-clubs transform shopping streets by night and draw revenue from tourists and other visitors as well as local residents. The functions these semi-public places serve are no less important when they occur in auto-oriented shopping centers. However, grouping most of these activities on interconnected pedestrian-oriented streets provides a synergy and sense of community that is difficult to achieve in any other way.

Mobility and Community Form Principles

Four key principles define mobility-friendly planning for shopping streets:

- Placemaking,
- Anchoring,
- Multi-use Parking, and
- Safe Connections.

"Encourage local cafes to spring up in each neighborhood…where people can sit with coffee or a drink and watch the world go by."

–Christopher Alexander

Placemaking:
Provide wide sidewalks with good lighting, shade, shelter, enclosure, transparency, places to sit and visual interest.

With wide sidewalks and ample places to sit, a successful shopping street accommodates groups of friends, persons with mobility limitations and anyone who simply wants an occasional rest while shopping. Parents with infants can pace their activities with an occasional break. Heavy shopping bags, the ultimate measure of a successful shopping experience, should not a deterrent to further strolling. Wide sidewalks provide ample space for outdoor displays of merchandise, enticing casual shoppers; they also accommodate café tables outside of restaurants. Enclosure of the sidewalk by buildings with windowed facades softens the line between public and private space, provides a sense of comfort and security, and helps deter crime. With a mix of uses and "microenvironments", the street continues to function well in the evening, in hot weather, and in rain or snow.

**"A street without windows is blind and frightening."
Christopher Alexander**

In cities and town centers, encouraging or requiring buildings to front on the street with limited setbacks helps to create a unified streetscape and a sheltered pedestrian environment. In rural areas, the shopping street pattern may be realized with a handful of stores well placed at a crossroads. Even a single old-style general store can serve the function of a shopping street in the smallest hamlets.

Regardless of size, having a town green or "market square" adjacent to the major shopping street extends its benefits and creates opportunities to accommodate larger community events, such as outdoor concerts. Shade trees, greens, public gardens and landscaped pocket parks provide visual relief from concrete pavement as well as environmental benefits. Well-maintained and interesting storefronts make shopping streets more attractive to shoppers and more secure for pedestrians.   Blank walls are intimidating and should be avoided.

Placemaking also includes the concept of "branding". Consider the community context of the shopping street when creating an iconic image (an historic tree, covered bridge, or element from the municipal seal), a palette of colors and materials for sidewalk pavers and street furniture, and even uniform signage. The art of placemaking has been elevated to high levels by mall developers. Traditional shopping streets can learn from those lessons, not replicating the mall experience, but adapting themes and strategies to enhance the unique and wonderful environment of the traditional downtown.

Merchants' organizations often play a key role in creating and maintaining successful shopping streets. They may organize sidewalk sales, encourage street performers, and arrange for a level of maintenance that would be difficult for the local government to provide on its own, sometimes by forming a Business Improvement District.

Even the smallest of main streets can beckon passersby. In rural Asbury, porch chairs and a "Muddy Boots Welcome" sign encourage farmers and other residents to make themselves at home on this small shopping street.

Anchoring:
Foster strolling by creating places of interest at the ends of shopping streets.

Along with placemaking, anchoring is another ingredient of successful shopping streets. An anchor can be visual (such as a striking building, clock tower, sculpture, water feature, a gateway, or even a vista) or a particularly "magnetic" destination place (a unique shop or restaurant). Shopping malls are typically "anchored" by large national retailers, a technique that can be adapted to virtually any scale of commercial center. Anchors typically denote a functional change or the end of something, so plan for portions of a shopping street beyond the anchor to be of a different scale or character. The street itself may terminate (perhaps at a crossing street) or there may be a gateway, jog or some other "closing" feature that marks the change in street function. A shopping street should not simply "peter out" with a few scattered businesses or converted homes serving as the gateway.

A street may be attractive, safe, and well maintained, but if there is nothing very interesting at its ends, people will be less inclined to walk any distance along it, and the stores in the middle (or those at a distance from parking areas) may suffer. Conversely, using anchors to create a "promenade" effect multiplies the opportunities for social interaction as well as the commercial effectiveness of the shopping street. The street is more memorable and the anchors aid in navigation. Activity on a successful shopping street spills over into other public places, reinforcing the civic quality of a community. Examples of

Monuments and statuary make excellent anchors and can be scaled and designed to match any theme.

shopping streets with a good anchoring quality include Ferry Street in Newark's Ironbound neighborhood and George Street in New Brunswick. Nassau Street in Princeton, for all of its other admirable qualities, is not particularly well anchored.

Reconciling Chain Stores with Mobility-Friendly Streets

While many people enjoy shopping at so-called "big box" stores and appreciate their potential to aid economic development and provide jobs, they give rise to concerns about traffic. Others are concerned that the cookie-cutter look of most chain stores will detract from the distinctive sense of place in their community. Communities across the country have successfully combined the benefits of chain stores with community-oriented design.

In order to act as anchors for shopping streets, big box stores must be built using the same <u>form</u> of development as the rest of the street. That is:
- The building wall should face and respect the street frontage (i.e., zero setback or a street level arcade with food).
- To the extent feasible, building materials and fenestration should reflect those used elsewhere on the shopping street.
- Surface parking should be behind the buildings and served by a well connected system of alleys, driveways or service roads.
- Parking garages should be enclosed within a "wrapper" of street level commercial space (at least) and upper level office or residential space.
- Short term parking should be available on the street frontage, as well as building entrances in close proximity.
- There should be street level windows on all frontages, even if they open into enclosed display cases.
- Signage should be oriented to pedestrian traffic as much as to vehicular traffic.

While traditional shopping streets are a proven element of community form, it may not be possible or practical to create them in every municipality. In particular, low-density suburbs whose commercial centers are entirely automobile oriented may find the creation of an authentic local "Main Street" an unrealistic goal, at least in the short term. Fortunately, it is often possible to redesign highway-oriented shopping centers so that some of the civic functions of a shopping street can still be realized. For instance, a large shopping center may be subdivided to create a block pattern served with footpaths. "Shopping highways" can be narrowed and pedestrian facilities added so that they function more as shopping streets. A more elaborate plan would be to create a median park with restaurants, music venues, informal seating areas and other activities as a focal point for a narrowed and calmed "shopping highway."

Above, a CVS pharmacy in Plainsboro, New Jersey was designed to fit the scale and character of the new downtown .

At the right, in San Jose, California, a Best Buy anchors a main street shopping district.

Street trees in Jersey City provide a visual transition between the pedestrian space of the street and the 4-5 story buildings that enclose it.

Street Trees

Street trees have both aesthetic and functional uses. Aesthetically, they provide much needed color, vertical height, and an edge. Functionally, street trees provide shade, shelter during rain or snow, and a logical buffer between moving traffic and pedestrians. The placement of street trees requires careful attention to safety. They should be placed so as not to obstruct the visibility of pedestrians to turning vehicles; nor should street trees interfere with overhead utilities, the opening of car doors, or roadside furniture. As a general rule, trees branches should be trimmed so that they fall no less than 7 feet above the sidewalk.

Street trees should be appropriately scaled to the street type and surrounding built environment. Urban boulevards with median pedestrian malls may warrant trees with larger trunks. Trees with small trunks are more appropriately used on busy retail streets with curbside parking (as parked vehicles themselves provide a buffer between pedestrians and the traffic stream). When choosing tree types, a landscape architect or arborist should be consulted. Tree types with root patterns that could eventually cause the sidewalk to shift and bulge, or could damage the foundations of adjacent buildings, should be avoided.

On heavily traveled pedestrian routes, street trees and tree wells should always be placed out of the pedestrian travel way. In locations with high pedestrian volumes, tree grates may be utilized to maximize sidewalk capacity. Drainage gaps within the grate should be small enough for strollers, wheelchairs, scooters, canes, and high-heeled shoes to pass over without difficulty.

Anchoring encourages more pedestrian traffic, thus enhancing nighttime security.

Shopping streets are ideal locations for community festivals.

Abandoned shopping centers, known as "greyfields," offer opportunities for redevelopment and the creation of pedestrian-oriented retail environments. Vacant, abandoned commercial buildings may meet the statutory conditions for an area "in need of redevelopment" under the Local Redevelopment and Housing Law, providing a mechanism for local governments to implement improvements, including transformation into mixed-use districts and the creation of new shopping streets. In fact, large, single ownership parcels such as these provide excellent opportunities to create off-highway "grid" systems that help contain local trips, thereby relieving highway congestion.

The Borough of South Bound Brook created design guidelines to help revitalize the Borough Center. Awnings, shade trees and pedestrian-scale lighting improve the walking environment. (Image courtesy of Borough of South Bound Brook/HNTB.)

Several New Jersey communities are currently investigating the potential for redevelopment of their highway commercial districts to better serve pedestrian and bicycle traffic, by selecting focal points for pedestrian oriented retrofit designs. Examples include communities along Route 130 in Burlington County and along Route 9 in Ocean County.

Multi-user Parking:

Provide convenient, well-marked parking suitable for varied users: behind shops, on-street, or structured where appropriate; always include parking for bicycles, sufficient handicapped spaces, and areas for truck deliveries.

Shopping streets, while predominantly pedestrian environments, should serve those who arrive by car or by bicycle with convenient parking. Plentiful, convenient parking helps shopping streets to compete effectively with strip malls. It encourages motorists to stop on impulse, and helps to discourage the double parking and weaving maneuvers that can lessen pedestrian safety on a shopping street. With plentiful parking, crowds can be accommodated on busy days or for special events, supporting special uses of the street for festivals, markets, and parades. Ample handicapped spaces encourage persons with disabilities to make use of the street. At the same time, planners should be aware of the potential to share parking among uses that peak at different times of day and avoid building too much parking. In sharing parking, analyze the building space by functional type (residential, office, retail, specialty, etc.) rather than specific proposed occupants, because occupancies will change over time.

On-street parallel parking (left) and surface parking lots located behind stores (right) make shopping streets friendly for drivers and pedestrians.

On-street automobile parking is characteristic of most of New Jersey's successful shopping streets, regardless of size. Surface parking lots and parking structures are often needed to supplement available on-street spaces. Bicycle parking is often overlooked, and those bicyclists who use the shopping street are forced to chain bikes to street signs and utility poles, which tends to create visual clutter and obstacles for pedestrians. Secure bike parking should be included at strategic locations near stores and in surface lots and structures. Bike parking requirements can be added to local parking ordinances. Some municipalities have established a ratio of bike spaces to automobile spaces that must be provided with new development, adding this provision to their zoning ordinance.

A parking garage wrapped with ground floor retail and upper story residential. Santana Row, San Jose, Ca. Clear signage reminds drivers to share streets and directs them to parking behind businesses.

Surface parking for shopping streets should be designed with care. To maintain the sense of enclosure and the visual quality of the streetscape, parking should be visually unobtrusive to street users. Pedestrians should not be required to walk across large parking lots to access stores. This generally requires placing parking behind shops or to the side, where landscaping may be used as a visual screen. However, for off-street parking to work, its presence needs to be obvious to drivers via signage. Visual screening should also not be so complete as to reduce the security of shoppers as they leave and return to their vehicles.

Truck deliveries must also be carefully accommodated. The more commercially successful the street is, the more deliveries will occur. Designated loading zones away from the main pedestrian crossings will help deter truck encroachment onto crosswalks and enhance driver and pedestrian visibility.

Kiosks enhance the sense of the street as a community gathering place. They can be used to post flyers and promote civic engagement and can sometimes be used by tourism agencies and ticket vendors. (Image courtesy of A. Nelessen Associtates).

Safe Connections:

Provide safe pedestrian connections for shoppers from parking areas, transit stops and adjacent neighborhoods; provide effective, regularly spaced crossings of the shopping street itself.

Echoing the principles of the Circulation pattern, a Shopping Street also requires safe pedestrian connections, both to the street from adjacent neighborhoods, transit stops and parking areas, but also across the street itself. Shoppers need convenient and secure access to the shopping street, regardless of their arrival mode of travel. Their sense of security while on the shopping street is affected by lighting and the placement of connecting pathways. Traffic speeds on a shopping street should be low – a target speed of not more than 25 mph – but pedestrians with shopping bags, strollers or disabilities may move slowly and need safe refuges such as bump outs or protected center medians to reduce crossing distances. Signage, push buttons, and crossing signals for pedestrians themselves should be logically placed and convenient to all users.

"Great streets are where pedestrians and drivers get along together."
– Allan Jacobs

Easy, frequent opportunities to cross the street are critical. Ease of crossing increases the promenade effect described earlier and helps businesses on both sides of the street to thrive. The ability to cross and recross without much thought or effort helps to create a strong pedestrian presence for the street, enhancing social interaction and adding to the civic character of the place.

Traffic speeds and the width of the street are again significant, as in the Circulation pattern. The ideal is two travel lanes with target speeds of no more than 25 mph. Higher speeds will compromise the pedestrian quality of the environment. More lanes may be accommodated, however, with medians or refuge islands and suitable pedestrian facilities at intersections. Curb bulb-outs are often desirable to shorten the crossing distance at crosswalks.

Other traffic calming devices, such as raised crosswalks (speed humps) or intersections (speed tables) may be considered in some circumstances. But care must be taken to avoid impeding transit, truck and emergency vehicle traffic. For specific guidance, see NJDOT's Roadway Design Manual.

Undivided four-lane arterials can often be successfully converted to three lanes (including a center two-way turning lane), freeing up space for new on-street parking areas, wider sidewalks, curb extensions and landscaping, as well as improved bus waiting areas. Bicycle lanes can also be considered as part of a four-to-three lane conversion.

Undivided multi-lane arterials make shopping streets difficult for pedestrians; medians and curb extensions can help improve crossability.
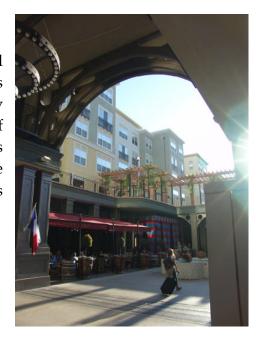
Well-marked crosswalks and downtowns filled with shops and services in Red Bank Borough (left) and Upper Montclair (right) make it convenient for pedestrians to safely run errands downtown and contribute to economic development.

Retail Arcades

Retail arcades can be very effective in creating movement on a shopping street. A retail arcade is an arched covered passageway or avenue with shops and/or restaurants. It is similar to a shopping mall, but open to the street on one side. It is most appropriately used in urban settings with significant pedestrian activity and a high concentration of retail shops. Typically, an arcade is embedded in the ground level of a building. As such, the responsibility of building and maintaining arcades usually lies with private developers. However, jurisdictions can control the placement and/or presence of arcades through the use of form-based zoning codes.

Resources for Shopping Streets

"Chain Drugstores," *National Trust for Historic Preservation*.
http://www.nationaltrust.org/issues/drugstores/index.html.

 "The Community Design Assessment: A Citizens' Planning Tool," Kennedy Smith and Leslie Tucker, National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Context Sensitive Solutions in Designing Major Urban Thoroughfares for Walkable Communities. Institute of Transportation Engineers, 2006.

Creating Livable Streets: Street Design Guidelines for 2040. Metro (Portland, OR), 2002.

Flexible Design of New Jersey's Main Streets. Reid Ewing and Michael King. NJDOT and Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center.

National Trust for Historic Preservation National Main Street Center, http://www.mainstreet.org/

Project for Public Spaces. www.pps.org

The Redevelopment Handbook: A Guide to Rebuilding New Jersey's Communities. New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, 2003.

When Main Street is a State Highway: Blending Function, Beauty, and Identity. A Handbook for Communities and Designers. Maryland DOT, State Highway Administration, 2001.