A New Central Business District for Noblesville, Indiana

Richard Todd Cass

Professors: Bruce Meyer
James Segedy

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The existence of distributed retail nodes on the fringes of small cities and towns has virtually eliminated the vitality of the Central Business District (C.B.D.), thereby enhancing social isolation and a deterioration of community identity.

Convenience for the consumer has been the main cause of this reoccurring dilemma for the past ten to fifteen years. Convenience is in relation to the consumers home, parking, and the variety of goods and services offered. The combination of these causes the consumer to become socially isolated within a particular region of the city, as well as enhancing economic class segregation. An active C.B.D. acts as an anchor for the city by pulling these groups together creating the social interaction needed to dissolve any barriers between different classes and regions.

A solution to this dilemma is to not compete with the retail nodes, but offer the consumer services unique to the C.B.D., examples being restaurants, theatres, dancing, and specialty shops. Offering these goods and services will add to the unique atmosphere and the consumers experience. He/she will once again look forward to frequenting the C.B.D., which as stated before will help to dissolve any social barriers existing, thereby creating a stronger notion of community.
Community identity is not attainable without the interaction of its residents. Identity being the atmosphere or characteristics associated with a place. Interaction can be attained in many ways, including everything from observable activities to participating in significant events.

The interaction which occurs is what sets the mood or atmosphere of a place. It is from this atmosphere, along with the appearance, that we base our assumptions about a place. The degree of success of a place depends upon the quality of the interaction taking place and will ultimately affect the image of the whole.

Interaction can make or break the entire image of place and community. The main idea to remember is interaction can only "occur," it cannot be forced in order to be of value.
Many of the problems of today's cities stem from the fact that the residents know only their adjoining neighbors. The reason for this lies in the fact that in the morning he/she drive to work, at the nearby large city, come home late only to eat and do some paperwork from the office and go to bed. A person with a five or six day week such as this is defined as being a bedroom commuter, that is the main use for one's home is sleeping.

If the couple, or parent, have children they usually are unable or unaware to attend their extra-curricular events, unless they are later in the evening. This gives them little involvement with the school community as well as isolating them even further from their children.

Many of these people are on the rising "ladder of success" and are only in a community for five to six years before being relocated. This does not allow them time to establish and take an active part in the community before having to move elsewhere. These people are not responsible for this, they are victims of today's fast paced commuter society.
Community of Noblesville

As a test of my thesis of urban revival I have chosen a design project in my hometown of Noblesville, Indiana. Located in central Indiana, Noblesville is the county seat of Hamilton County. It is located approximately twenty miles north of Indianapolis, the state capital.

In 1823, William Conner and Josiah Polk laid out the original grid plan adjacent to the east bank of the White River. Less than a year later Noblesville was a chartered town. The town's economy was that of an agrarian society. With the addition of a grist mill on the river by Conner, Noblesville began to enter the industrialized era. The mill sustained the town for many years and its legacy exists today with the high school's mascot, the "Miller Man". The county courthouse and jail were completed in 1878 located on a traditional town square like most other towns of this time. Even today the courthouse remains the tallest building in the town. Over the course of the next twenty years the Noblesville c.b.d. became a retail center. A major contributor to this was the introduction of the railroad which turned the town towards industry and for a variety of manufactured goods. During the early 1900's Noblesville was strong enough to support its own inter-urban system that extended to Indianapolis. Noblesville continued
to flourish, even in spite of the flood of 1913. Even with the two bridges spanning the White River all of the commercial development continued to remain east of the river while the west was still agricultural. Industries continued to prosper through the two world wars and reached its high point in the '60's. The school system had been totally rebuilt, commercial activity was high, agricultural returns soared, and the county was showcasing its new reservoir north-west of town.

The people of Noblesville have always been extremely proud of their roots. This is shown by generation after generation continuing to live there. Farms have been passed down through the years and an appreciation for the land as well as respect for the families has been preserved.

During the past fifteen years, Hamilton County has experienced an extreme amount of growth. The land surrounding the reservoir was sold to a developer and virtually overnight a new town was constructed. By 1980 Noblesville's population had doubled, but the c.b.d. activity had diminished. This new commuting culture was foreign to the town natives. These new faces also had a strong connection with the rapidly expanding north side of Indianapolis.

The development of three major shopping
Distances in miles to the following cities are:

- Indianapolis, IN: 15 miles
- Louisville, KY: 111 miles
- Chicago, IL: 181 miles
- Dayton, OH: 107 miles
- Columbus, OH: 171 miles
- St. Louis, MO: 235 miles
- Peoria, IL: 211 miles
- Cincinnati, OH: 106 miles
- Toledo, OH: 220 miles
- South Bend, IN: 126 miles
- Ft. Wayne, IN: 118 miles
- Cleveland, OH: 294 miles
- Milwaukee, WI: 268 miles
- Detroit, MI: 278 miles
malls, all within thirty minutes of Noblesville. With inflation at its peak and the larger corporations in Indianapolis taking over, all but one industry, Firestone, shut their doors. Farmers also began to lose their footholds with the failing economy.

Attempts to revive and preserve the c.b.d. have met with dismal results. Most new developments have taken the form of "strip" retail centers on the fringes of the east, west, and south sides of town. This has made the downtown nothing more than a thoroughfare for cross town traffic during rush hours. The combination of these three has led the native Noblesville businessman to struggle, move, or go out of business.

The last few years has seen yet another change in Noblesville. There seems to be a sincere interest to revive the downtown. The natives have finally accepted the commuter culture, and the commuters feel a sense of belonging to the town, which has caused a common interest for the revival.
The need for a bypass around Noblesville is imperative considering over 20,000 vehicles creep along the only cross town road (hwy 32/33), which goes through the c.b.d. in order to get to and from work. All other routes leading to Indianapolis carry less than 10,000 vehicles daily.

With the majority of the traffic coming from the north-west of Noblesville the bypass should be located on the south side of Noblesville. The location chosen would be at the junction of hwy. 32 and 33 on the east side heading south and around to 41st street, then west to hwy. 32 where it will terminate.

Several reasons backing the idea of a bypass are as follows: A southern road gives the city a boundary, which terminates the rapid commercial growth along the highways north of Indianapolis and protects the identity of the city from being engulfed. By not allowing commercial development along the bypass as other cities have done it will remain what it was intended for, to move traffic around the city quickly and rid the c.b.d. of cross town traffic. Another asset to be gained from the bypass is the creation of a green belt on both sides of the bypass. Within this corridor scenic trails should be created linking to
the White River corridor development. This also provides a noise buffer between the bypass and the residential areas. A third reason being that truck traffic will have an easier time getting to their destinations by not having to make any tight turns downtown as well as most of the truck traffic is usually through traffic anyway. By eliminating this traffic it has also added years to the life of the historic buildings of the c.b.d. by eliminating the vibrations the trucks caused which damages the structure of the building, as well as eliminating the ever present sound of traffic.
Repairing Existing C.B.D.

In order to revive the c.b.d. the store owners must first make their buildings look attractive. Any visitor's impression of the city will come from the condition of the store facades. In Noblesville they are for the most part from the 19th century. They are rich in detail and scaled to the pedestrian. Since then many different fenestrations have been placed over the original facades, and in most cases can be removed without causing much damage.

The store owners have several options from which to chose from in order to improve their facade. The first and probably most expensive option is to restore the facade to its original character. This usually requires the hiring of someone with professional know-how to do the job. The second option is that of a paint-up/fix-up program. This option involves minor repairs, reusing and restoring the original window openings on all levels along with cleaning, painting, and fixing up the rest of the facade. The third option involves a new development which respects the historic quality of itself and its neighbors while utilizing materials and a character of its own time.

As stated previously, a visitor's first view of the town can tell them of the quality
of the services within as well as portraying the population's pride in, and vitality of the community.
Restored Facade

Renovated Facade
Existing Facade
The city of Noblesville has a unique opportunity besides fixing up the existing central business district. Being located within two blocks of the White River, presently the city has ignored the potential of developing the riverfront as a means of regaining the vitality once found around the courthouse square.

My proposal involves the city working jointly with a private developer in the construction of an exterior mall/riverfront park development, to be located between the courthouse and the river. The need for the private developer lies in the fact that he/she can more readily attract the type of retail establishments needed for the development. This also eliminates the city of costs incurred by having to go out and sell the city to clients to locate in Noblesville. It also keeps the city from being financially strapped for the entire project. The developer's responsibility basically entails the construction on the site and the leasing of retail space. The city would then be responsible for maintenance and security. The funding for the maintenance and security shall come from the tenants of the retail district in order that local tax money need not be used.
As one enters the city from the west he/she will pass the gateway to the c.b.d. which is marked by a clock tower and three flagpoles, flying the American, Indiana, and City of Noblesville flags. This also gives the motorists enough of a glimpse into the complex to see there is something within to go visit as well as acting as a vista for passing pedestrians. The buildings along here while not replicating the existing c.b.d. will respect the prevalent 19th century character.

Presently there is a twenty-five foot drop virtually straight down to the river. Due to this the site will be developed in tiers leading down to the rivers edge. The ground removed is to be used to construct an extended river walk both north and south of the site. Ramps will be incorporated into this in order to make the handicaps accessibility complete throughout the development.

The development will be set up in such a fashion that the eastern half will be retail, while the western will be a park setting. A transitional zone has been incorporated in order to begin to break away from the structured city grid and begin radiating out to the river. It has also been done to allow nature to be brought up into the city from the river.
The beginning of the transitional zone begins at the gazebo. The gazebo is the focal point of the entire development. It marks the axis of the main entries as well as the focal point of the radiating park development. It functions as a staging area for bands, public speakers, awards ceremonies and other various attractions. It will also become a natural meeting place for families and friends to meet, regroup before leaving, or to check-in.

The fountain which begins at the perimeter of the gazebo area represents the man made portion of a transition back to the natural river through the use of water. Water generated in the upper pool and cascades down terminating as a waterfall back into the river from which it was extracted originally. During the winter these pools will be allowed to freeze offering the public a place to ice skate. This enables the entire site to be active year round.

The rivers edge is for the most part will remain untouched. The river bank will be left as is wherever possible. To accomplish this the portion of the river walk which extends over the river will be a pier, while the rest will be built into the ground. The reasoning behind this is so less debris will be trapped
along the edge of the river as would be
the case if the river walk were allowed
to be constructed into the riverbed.
The exposed bank will be built up, exploited,
and in places over-take the walkway,
thereby interconnecting the natural and
manmade.

Portraying community pride by bringing
family and friends together for a day in
a festive atmosphere involving shopping,
eateries, walking, talking, boating, and
fishing is the goal in order to bring
back the vitality back to the central
business district of Noblesville, Indiana.
View of gateway
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