

it is time that residents' involvement to engage in a public policy discussion about commercial invasion. The National Trust for Historic Preservation states that urban sprawl, a long standing national problem, has entered a new and more destructive phase with the rapid proliferation of large discount stores and retail outlets on the edges of metropolitan cities and towns. It is the combination of public policy decisions made on the national, state and local level, supportive character styles and economics which makes it intractable and citizens influence this pattern rather than react to it.

Sprawl is low density, land consuming, and one oriented development located on the outskirts of towns and cities. Sprawl is a product of public policies and private development practices. For example, federal non-spatial policy over the past 50 years has encouraged auto dependent by promoting and subsidizing highway construction while failing to prevent the construction of rail, bus and other forms of public transportation. These policies increased efforts to make communities more walkable and improve the needs and safety of pedestrians. State transportation policies also increasingly favor vehicular over pedestrian and public transportation. Communities are pressed to accept the widening of roads that destroy walkable main streets and encourage commercial strip development in outlying areas.

Local policies have also encouraged sprawl. We've created zoning policies are essential tools for protecting a community's distinctive character. But local zoning laws, many adopted in the 1950's, are outdated in the goal of maintaining the national character of a New England Main Street.

In Winston, for example, the Yale Urban Design Workshop's Historic Regeneration studies that the basic vision of Main Street envisioned in Winston's zoning regulations is of a suburban strip like that found on Route 44 between Averet and Canton. By requiring inappropriate large front, side, and rear yard setbacks, zoning regulations create excessive distances between buildings, virtually guaranteeing a community's automobile dependence. These zoning regulations are not just flawed in Winston. In fact, in much of the United States it is now against zoning law to build tightly built communities, places like Beacon Hill, Greenwich, Essex, downtown Fort

Magnificent

Most large, national superstores have similar characteristics. They are very big, ranging in size from 90,000 to 200,000 square feet. They do not generally locate downtown, even when space is available. They prefer to locate on land near the exits of highways. They use the same store design, a windowless box, regardless of its incompatibility with the surroundings. They usually consist of a single front by-out, so the store spreads out over several acres. Not designed or located so people can walk, or ride a bike or bus to them, they require vast expanses of parking.

Sprawl has already devastated many communities, as empty downtown buildings and degraded countryside demonstrate. Citizens are concerned about sprawl but, when they speak out against it they are told that it is inevitable or that opposition will prevent new jobs and tax revenue for the community.

Sprawl, however, is not synonymous with growth and development. Not all development produces a net increase in jobs or tax revenue. New development that is appropriately sized for the community, that makes good use of existing buildings and infrastructure, that minimize harm to the natural environment and fits in with its neighbors makes economic sense.

Development which exceeds a community's capacity to absorb it, that triggers the abandonment of public and private structures, helps neither the local economy nor the local tax base in the long run. Large commercial development that are out of scale with a community's existing streets disrupt the local economy and change a town's way of life. Studies have demonstrated that superstore projects come at the expense of existing businesses, especially small businesses. Money

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generated by local stores typically circulates in the community. But money generated by superstores goes directly to out-of-town corporate headquarters.

The challenge involves encouraging new development to take place in ways that build on a community's existing resources rather than duplicating or destroying them. Opposing development to increase the economic benefits to the community. The construction of too much retail systems are making economic pie larger. It usually only reallocated the pie, with businesses leaving the big portions and small local businesses getting the crumbs.

So reverse the superstores and their effect on communities as the American way and call it progress. But the free market theory of economics functions on notions of cost reduction and increase in efficiency. In the superstore theory of economics costs are cut by shifting them to someone else. Superstores build big, cheap, ugly buildings that no one wants to live near. They pressure their suppliers to reduce costs so the suppliers have to move production to poorer countries and pay wages that do not support a decent life. Super-

stores employ part time workers, provide no useful job training and no health benefits - citizens taxes or insurance will pay for workers health care. Superstore pressure towns for tax breaks, fire trucks, water lines and sewers. The taxpayers pick up the costs.

The superstore theory of economics is not only unjust to others, it undermines the market system. It drives prices by bidding out costs. It is not the American way to condense the business community and concentrate's geographic monopoly. When the needs of small businesses are killed off, only a handful of national corporations remain, it does not take a economist to predict what will happen to those discount prices.

Residents have to live with the disruption that sprawl creates. It is, therefore, necessary and reasonable to address the long term effects of this type of development. Citizens can encourage new development and insist that developers not destroy historic, scenic and community resources. We have a responsibility to create and use planning and zoning tools to preserve these resources and create better environments for people.

This is an issue which requires balance and perspective, both short and long term. This can only be accomplished through public deliberation and action. In Winston, the Winston Design Coalition and in Torrington, the Main Street Action Team are beginning to address these issues. For more information or responsible development practices and how to encourage superstores to be better corporate neighbors, contact the National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1785 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036 or the Office of the Community Lawyer, P.O. Box 1064, Winston, CT, 06098.